



## **Stetson University College of Law Crisis Communications Plan**

### **Introduction and Guiding Principles**

Stetson University College of Law's Crisis Communications Plan summarizes the roles, responsibilities, and protocols that will guide the College of Law in promptly communicating with its main constituent groups, and the public, during an emergency or crisis. Disasters, emergencies, and crises disrupt the College of Law's normal activities and may require activation of various specific emergency plans depending on the issue at hand. This Crisis Communications Plan summarizes the College of Law's ability to communicate vital information to members of the College of Law community and the public.

The audiences for this plan include students, full-time and adjunct faculty, staff, alumni, overseers, trustees, neighbors, city leaders, media and the greater University community. State and federal officials will be notified on a case-by-case basis.

Our guiding principles are to communicate known facts as quickly as possible, update information regularly as circumstances change, enhance the safety of the Stetson Law community, and continue essential services. Honesty and speed are the most effective means to avoid misinformation and reduce the possibility of internal and external confusion.

We realize that in a crisis, people will likely expect the College of Law administration to have more information than we may actually have. That makes it imperative for us to speak with accuracy about what we know and not speculate about details we do not know.

We will use multiple channels to reach as many people as possible with accurate and timely information. This is especially important during and in the first hours and days following a crisis. Our goal is to be open, accountable, and accessible to all audiences, while mindful of legal and privacy concerns.

## Assessing the Severity of a Crisis or Emergency

Stetson University College of Law defines a **crisis** as an unexpected, severe business disruption that involves the College of Law's facilities, employees, students, or assets. A crisis may prompt significant or sustained news coverage and public scrutiny, and has the potential to damage the law school and/or the university's image, reputation, or financial stability. A crisis could be precipitated by an emergency or controversy.

An **emergency** is a natural, man-made, or other event that presents an ongoing threat, or an event that involves a response from police, fire, or emergency medical personnel. Examples of emergencies include fires, severe tropical storms, hurricanes, serious accidents on campus, and serious crime.

A **controversy** could be a protest or situation arising out of student or employee misconduct.

In assessing a crisis or emergency, the severity and level of response needed may vary. To that end, we categorize crises based on the level of response expected to be reasonably necessary based on known facts. Below is a brief summary of our categories:

**Basic** - Can be handled by on-duty personnel.

**Intermediate** - Can be handled by personnel who respond, with support from other Stetson employees on duty or those who may have to be called in.

**Significant** - Requires additional people beyond regular employees who manage emergencies. These employees may be from other Stetson campuses. They may have to be supplemented by emergency response personnel from the local community, or outside consultants or vendors.

**Catastrophic** - Will affect Stetson University College of Law operations for an extended period of time, including possible school closure. Typically requires all available personnel. Local emergency response agencies likely will be actively involved. Depending on the severity of the situation, government agencies also may be involved in the response.

### Crisis Communications Team

The following personnel serve as regular members of the Crisis Communication Team. Individuals listed also may serve dual roles as members of other operational teams charged with managing emergency activities affecting the campus, such as activities under the hurricane plan or other emergency plans in place at the College of Law.

- **Dean of the College of Law:** In charge of overall activities of the Crisis Communications Team.
- **Executive Director of Communications:** Responsible for coordinating communications with the media, public, and other outside constituencies.

- **Chief of Public Safety:** Responsible for managing the security of employees, students, and others on campus, and interfacing with external first responders (e.g., police, fire, EMS).
- **Associate Vice President of Budget and Finance; Assistant Dean for Administration and Decision Support:** Responsible for coordinating legal or human resources assistance and support, reporting claims to relevant insurers, and coordinating insurer assistance in times of crisis or emergency, and working with the Dean to manage the financial implications of any crisis or emergency, including facilitating the execution of contracts for support and access to financial resources.
- **Chief Technology Officer:** Responsible for enabling and maintaining message distribution channels for use by Crisis Communications Team.
- **Director of Facilities Management:** Responsible for issues related to transportation and facilities.

Depending on the nature and scope of the crisis or emergency, effective communication will depend on access to immediate and accurate logistical and other information about the crisis or emergency, and the support services available to students, faculty, and staff. To have this information readily available, the following positions may be asked to provide direct logistical support to the crisis Communications Team:

- **Associate Dean of Academic Affairs; Associate Dean for Faculty; Associate Dean for Student engagement:** Responsible for matters relating to the academic program and academic schedule; also responsible for coordinating with the individual in charge of the electronic education program.
- **Director, Tampa Law Center:** Responsible for helping to coordinate any response needed at the Tampa Law Center, notifying the Crisis Communication Team of events impacted in Tampa, and serving as a liaison with the Second District Court of Appeal.
- **Director of Student Life:** Responsible for facilitating access to student support services through SAP.
- **Registrar:** Responsible for facilitating access to student contact information, including emergency contact data, and coordinating support for class disruption issues in conjunction with the Associate Dean of Academics and Director of Conferences and Events.
- **Assistant Dean for Development and Alumni Engagement:** Responsible for facilitating access to contact information for alumni as necessary to communicate during a crisis.
- **Law Library Director:** Responsible for providing information regarding impact on

library assets and services.

- **Assistant Dean of Admissions and Student Financial Planning:** Responsible for supplying data for admitted students who have not yet matriculated if communication to this group is needed and for providing information about any impact, if any, of the crisis or emergency on student financial aid.
- **Director for Human Resources:** Responsible for coordinating human resources assistance and support and facilitating access to employee contact information, including employee emergency contact data and employee benefit information; coordinating employee support through EAP; and effectuating pay delivery when College of Law operations have been disrupted.
- **Manager of Residential Properties:** Responsible for supplying information on occupancy and locations for all Stetson housing and assisting with alternative arrangements as needed when housing is disrupted.
- **Public Safety Coordinator; Executive Assistant to the Dean:** These two positions are responsible for documentation support and database information. They will work with Public Safety to help secure and coordinate additional phone operators if 24-hour live phone coverage is needed. They may also be asked to assist others on the team with various tasks. The Executive Assistant to the Dean will provide current contact information for the members of the President’s Staff, Board of Overseers, and Board of Trustees, as needed.

Others may be assigned to provide information and support as needed.

### **Putting the Plan into Action**

Our Crisis Communications Team will convene when the Dean or the Dean’s designee determines circumstances warrant it. In the event of an ongoing threat, the “Cleary Act” requires colleges and universities to make timely notifications to the campus community. That issue is covered below under Cleary Warnings.

**If the Dean is not available, one of the Associate Deans or Chief of Public Safety** may convene the Crisis Communications Team.

In addition, any member of the Crisis Communications Team may at any time identify a potential crisis or controversy that is not an immediate emergency and request that the Crisis Communications Team be assembled to prepare a communications strategy—again, as part of a coordinated Stetson University College of Law response.

After the Crisis Communications Team meets and determines whether the College of Law is facing a crisis, implementation of this plan can be adjusted as needed.

### **Crisis Communications Team Responsibilities**

## **Initial Response**

If the Crisis Communications Team is assembled, the team members who arrive initially will meet to determine the steps needed to stabilize the situation. They will consider at least the following matters:

- Accident control, containment, and emergency recovery efforts
- Casualties or injuries, both internal and external
- Employees, students, and family members affected by the emergency
- Damage to facilities and business assets
- Impact on other campus operations
- News media coverage thus far
- Involvement of other companies
- Outlook for the next several hours
- Potential damage
- Reaction and concerns of local community officials
- Government agency response
- Status of cleanup and repair operations

This Crisis Communications Plan is intended as an overlay plan that will support communication efforts in any crisis. Thus, certain team members with responsibilities under this plan will at the same time be performing their operational roles under applicable emergency plans, such as the hurricane plan. Any personnel not part of the Crisis Communications Team but having information on any of the items listed above under *Initial Response* should funnel that information to a Crisis Communications Team member. The Dean will work closely with the team both to prepare the communications plan of response and to comply with Clery Act requirements for security alerts upon confirmation of a significant emergency or dangerous situation involving an immediate threat to the health or safety of students or employees occurring on the campus unless issuing a notification will compromise efforts to contain the emergency.

## **Communicating Messages to Key Audiences**

In a time of crisis emergency, the Dean or the Dean's designee will take the lead in communicating key messages and answering questions.

The Dean also may designate the Executive Director of Communications or another senior administrator to serve as spokesperson. The spokesperson will be the public face of Stetson University College of Law and will be responsible for communicating current and accurate information.

**Staff and faculty should not speak with the news media, as they may not have the most current information.** Instead, see the section below on *How the Stetson Community Can Help* for detailed information on how you can support the College of Law's communication efforts.

Stetson University College of Law has developed procedures for communicating crisis information via the Stetson Law Web site, text message and e-mail alerts, an emergency hotline, intercom, and the news media as needed. The complete policy is located at: <http://www.stetson.edu/law-alerts>

Information about the College of Law's emergency preparedness can be found at: [www.stetson.edu/law/communications/preparedness/home](http://www.stetson.edu/law/communications/preparedness/home)

In general, the College of Law uses the following:

- Notice on the College of Law's Web site, [www.law.stetson.edu](http://www.law.stetson.edu) (front page);
- E-mail to student, faculty, and staff lists;
- Text messages to cell phones of members of the Stetson community who have registered for this service on the College of Law portal "Stetson Connect."
- Announcements on television, radio stations, newspapers, and media internet sites in the greater St. Petersburg, Tampa, and Sarasota areas.
- Social media such as Facebook

The Executive Director of Communications will work with the Chief Technology Officer and I.T. staff to make needed updates. Fact sheets will be used to update Web sites, e-mails, news releases, and other communication channels. They will also help guide the team's overall strategy as events unfold.

Our goal is to be as responsive as possible to news media in a manner that does not compromise our operational response. During a crisis or emergency, it is important to maintain an organized log of interview requests so that calls are returned promptly. These requests should be directed to the Executive Director of Communications.

### **Media Communications Center**

If the crisis response is likely to continue for an extended period, the College of Law will establish a Media Communications Center from which members of the Crisis Communications Team and other support personnel will work. The location for the Media Communications Center will depend of the nature of the crisis or emergency and the availability of a safe and accessible location for media personnel to assemble and obtain information for the College of Law. The availability and location of a Media Communications Center will be announced via normal media channels used by the College of Law.

### **Scheduling News Releases and Briefings**

The Dean, or Associate Deans, with the support of the Executive Director of Communications, will determine when news releases will be issued and news conferences scheduled.

## **Security Alerts and Other Emergency Information**

Security Alerts are timely warnings issued by the College of Law (typically by the Public Safety Chief) immediately upon confirmation of a significant emergency or dangerous situation involving an immediate threat to the health or safety of students or employees occurring on the campus unless issuing a notification will compromise efforts to contain the emergency.

Security Alerts can be issued for threats to property, as well as threats to persons. Nothing prohibits the issuance of Security Alerts for crimes or continuing threats to the campus community beyond those crimes and incidents subject to data collection and reporting under the College of Law Annual Security Report.

For more detail on the College of Law policy on Security Alerts, see <http://www.stetson.edu/law-alerts>

In addition, on an annual basis, the College of Law publicizes its emergency response and evacuation procedures for the entire campus. This includes policies on testing emergency response and evacuation procedures on an annual basis. A complete copy of the College of Law's most recent Annual Security Report is available at <https://www.stetson.edu/administration/public-safety/reports.php>

## **Ongoing Crisis Management**

The goal of Stetson University College of Law is to get any crisis or emergency under control as quickly and safely as possible so the College of Law might resume normal operations. The overall approach will be to pursue the applicable recovery plan developed by the College of Law, working with local government officials as much as reasonably practical and warranted based on the circumstances.

## **How the Stetson Community Can Help**

As stated previously, the goal of this plan is to have a coordinated and accurate communication response in any crisis or emergency. To achieve this goal, our community can help in several ways, including:

- **Funnel available information to the Crisis Communications Team:** If any member of the community hears or obtains information regarding a crisis or emergency from sources other than the College of Law Crisis Communications Team, pass on that information to a team member. This will help to ensure the team has the most accurate and up-to-date information.
- **Refrain from speaking with the media:** We ask that members of the community not speak with the media, as they may not have the most current information. One

designated spokesperson will ensure continuity of all information disseminated from Stetson University College of Law. In addition, laws such as FERPA can sometimes place restrictions on what information we are legally able to release. The Crisis Communications Team is aware of these limitations and can tailor information releases appropriately. A second tier of trained and designated spokespersons will assemble in times of crisis.

- **Use text-messaging during a crisis period:** One challenge during a crisis may be overloaded cell towers resulting in limited cell phone connectivity. However, text messages can often make it through the system. We encourage everyone to use text-messaging as their primary communication method during a crisis.

With your support, this plan can serve as an effective tool in meeting our goals.

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