

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Campus administrators are partially responsible for how a campus responds to a critical incident and how the students and outside community are impacted. It is important for administrators responding to critical incidents to take an objective look at their plans and preparations to determine if they will truly be effective and adequate in a time of need. Through assessment and evaluation of current response measures and past response efforts, campus responders can gain a sense of what needs exist on their campus in terms of preparing for a critical incident.

This research primarily addresses the question, “What are best practices for critical incident response on a college campus with a small population?” It took the form a case study on one campus with a small student population. I conducted individual, one-on-one interviews with various campus administrators involved with critical incident response at that campus to gain insight into their experiences, and perceptions, and reflections with critical incident response.

The end product of this research takes the form of a set of nine dimensions of critical incident response and a set of best practices within each dimension, both informed by the interview data and related literature.

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Critical Incident Response on a Small College Campus

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Critical Incident Response on a Small College Campus

Chapter 1: Introduction

It starts as a typical day, evening or night. Then a disaster shatters the normal campus routine. The calamity could be a tornado, a fire, an accident or an act of violence. No matter how safe your setting, a disaster can occur at any time. The amount of damage done, the extent of civil liability and possibly the number of lives that are lost may be dictated by the effectiveness of your emergency operations planning. The steps that are taken long before the crisis unfolds determine how well it is handled. (Dorn, 2001, p. 23)

Campus administrators are responsible for how a campus responds to a critical incident and how the students and outside community are impacted. Among other responsibilities, it is the job of higher education administrators to ensure safety, stability, and comfort to the maximum extent possible to all individuals within the campus community. Higher education administrators include any staff member working on a campus, with this research particularly focusing on those in student support services and who work directly with critical incident response. No campus is immune to the possibility of a critical incident; in fact, some campuses are extremely vulnerable to certain risks depending on characteristics such as geographic location and urban or rural placement, among others. The mission of most colleges is to provide a stable educational environment for campus members, and a critical incident can be a threat to this mission. While there is no way to eliminate the possibility of a critical incident occurring, there are ways for a campus to prevent and respond to critical incidents to minimize harm and damage.

It is important for administrators responding to critical incidents to take an objective look at their plans and preparations to determine if they will truly be effective and adequate in a time of need. Through assessment and evaluation of current response measures and past response efforts, campus responders can gain a sense of what needs exist on their campus in terms of preparing for a critical incident. Campus responders include any higher education administrator working directly with critical incident response on a college campus. Responders should study the best practices of critical incident response, such as those available in the literature I have reviewed and the results of this research.

This research addresses the question, “What are best practices for critical incident response on a college campus with a small population?” This research took the form of a case study on one campus with a small student population that has experienced one or more critical incidents within the past ten years. I conducted individual, one-on-one interviews with various campus administrators involved with critical incident response at that campus to gain insight into their experiences, and perceptions, and reflections with critical incident response. These administrators came from the general student support service areas of campus safety, residence life, campus life, counseling services, and office of the chaplain.

This research is significant in supporting small campuses in the present and future as they strive to negotiate critical incidents and respond with appropriate measures, timeliness, and sensitivity to the entire campus, student body, and outside community. The purpose of a college or university is to provide a safe educational environment, and a critical incident can threaten that environment. While it may not be

possible to prevent all critical incidents from occurring, this research is meant to help support colleges in minimizing the harm caused by critical incidents.

The end product of this research takes the form of a set of nine dimensions of critical incident response and a set of best practices within each dimension, both informed by the interview data and related literature.

I analyzed the interview data by considering how it was or was not consistent with these originally developed dimensions, and then shaped the final guide of best practices accordingly. I strove to acknowledge the unique aspects of each campus and each critical incident as I developed this guide by keeping the best practices broad and not specific to an individual campus or type of critical incident. It is my intent that this set of best practices be used as a jumping off point for administrators to perform their own reflections and evaluations, and develop their own best practices and philosophies for response.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review within this chapter explores current texts and materials in connection with critical incident response. The first section will review related literature within elementary and secondary education settings, the second section will review related literature within higher education settings, and the third section will discuss the relation of the literature to my research and describe of a set of thirteen dimensions of critical incident response on a small college campus that I developed based on this literature review which I used to analyze the data. The data analysis process is further described in Chapter 3.

Literature Related To K-12 Critical Incident Response

While there has been relatively limited research and writing done regarding critical incident response on college campuses, more literature has been published within the past decade regarding the same topic in relation to elementary and secondary education. While there are many differences between college and elementary/secondary campuses and the ways in which they respond to critical incidents, both broad and specific, many of the concepts behind critical incident response, such as developing response teams, memorializing and honoring, and diversity issues, are universal to both.

When brainstorming lists of the aspects of critical incident response there were several articles that provided a very general, broad scope of what a critical incident response entails. “Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities”, an informational brochure published by the US Department of

Education (2004) laid out practical checklists for working with critical incident response at different stages, including preparing for crisis, mitigation and prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. The steps this resource advises responders to take are clearly and concisely written and touch on almost every aspect of response, illustrating a comprehensive picture of response as a whole. This information provided me with a wealth of suggestions for the many aspects of critical incident response, as well as the order of prioritization. While this brochure was developed for elementary and secondary education uses, the information provided in this brochure is general to all classroom and education settings and is transferable to higher education settings. However, this brochure fails to go in-depth about any of the steps the authors advise taking, providing no explanation as to why or how these efforts should be undertaken, which is crucial in advising individuals on responding to a critical incident.

“School Preparation to the Terrorist Threat: SVRC Fact Sheet” published by School Violence Resource Center (2004) is a one-page fact sheet providing a list of “lessons learned” compiled by the U.S. Department of Education. Examples of the critical incident “lessons learned” include having a comprehensive school safety plan, developing plans with input from public and private agencies, conducting practice drills on a regular basis, and initiating relationships with local health and mental health providers. Each of these relate directly with the best practices I have developed, detailed in Chapter 5, such as developing clear and in-depth strategic response plans, including local responders in discussions and planning, and considering scenario-driven training. Similar to the “Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities” (2004) article described above, there is a distinct lack of

rationale behind these suggestions. The information provided in this text was useful for brainstorming critical incident response in general, but provided no depth of information or suggestions on how responders could put these acts into practice.

“Responding to Critical Incidents: A Resource Guide for Schools” published by the British Columbia Department of Education (1998) provided a much deeper and more detailed level of information on a variety of aspects of critical incident response. This resource guide is “intended to assist schools in developing protocols for responding to critical incidents” (p. 1). This guide breaks down response into a series of ten steps: gathering the facts, contact with the district, activate the school team, communication with staff, set up counseling centers, talk with students, informing parents, funeral information, team review, and remembrance activity (p. 16 – 25). It also contains guidelines for communication, a series of checklists and agendas, guidelines for grief support groups, stress debriefing and suicide warning signs. Many of the guidelines and suggestions are transferable to a higher education setting, and I have used quite a lot of this material to create the more detailed information I provide in the dimensions of response I have outlined in Chapter 5.

It was from this document that I was able to begin to understand the magnitude of time, energy, and resources required for a critical incident response to be truly successful. The information in this document also informed many of the best practices I developed, such as planning for how information will be distributed, remembering that each individual will process and respond to emotions, grief, and trauma differently, and considering any memorializing and honoring efforts that may be needed.

“In a Crisis, Focus on the People” by Paul M. Hewitt (2004) addresses working with issues of emotional trauma and healing as you respond to a critical incident, specifically creating a working plan and focusing on the healing process. The article serves as a reminder that “schools and school districts are made up of emotional individuals” (p.44). It also emphasizes bringing in professionals, in this case psychologists, to handle an aspect of the critical incident response, a concept I was able to apply to many of the response dimensions I created and which helped to inform the best practices I created within the response dimension of Public Relations, detailed in Chapter 5.

“Protecting Vital Records in a Crisis” by Van Carlisle (2005), published in the *School Administrator* journal, describes the legal and ethical responsibilities as well as practical suggestions specifically in reference to protecting valuable documents. This article was helpful in my further understanding some of the physical, logistical aspects of preparing for and responding to a critical incident. This article explains that, “If a vital record is lost, damaged, destroyed or otherwise rendered unavailable, that loss becomes a disaster within a disaster, affecting critical operations needed to recover from the initial disaster” (p. 1). The information provided in this article applies mostly to natural disasters, fires, or floods where the physical elements of a school are at risk, and would not be of as much use while responding to a student death or crime on campus.

“The Impact of Terrorism on School Safety Planning” by Kenneth S. Trump (2002), published in the journal of *School Planning & Management*, addresses issues of critical incident response in relation to terrorism specifically. Terrorism, with the

attacks on the World Trade Center Towers in September 11, 2001, has become a matter of concern for many people nationally, including those working in elementary, secondary, and higher education. This article described ways to work with specific types and elements of critical incidents, including anthrax scares, technology failure, and “heightened security” (p. 24). While terrorism may not be a commonly occurring element of critical incident response at schools, this article provided me with insight into the importance of addressing this possibility and communicating your preparation to parents and community members. This information helped me to develop the best practices of preparing for large-scale and national critical incidents as well as the best practices outlined in the dimensions of public relations and information distribution, detailed in Chapter 5.

“Preparing for a Crisis” by Rosalie D. Perea and Shirley Morrison (1997), published in the *Educational Leadership* journal, explains how a large school district in Albuquerque, New Mexico responded to the death of a student in an armed robbery at an off-campus location. The article explains some of the lessons learned from this experience, as well as recommendations for other schools responding to the death of a student. Particularly useful for the purposes of my research was the advice on “Fine-Tuning Crisis Counseling” (p. 43), which explained how to work with community members to provide adequate counseling for all of the parties impacted. This information helped to inform the best practices I outline within the dimension of human physical and psychological needs, detailed in Chapter 5.

“Coping with Crisis” by James Akenhead and Alan Andreani (2002), published in the *American School Board Journal*, details the lessons learned when a

school district finds itself in the midst of a meningitis outbreak. This article illustrated the many ways places of elementary and secondary education have struggled and succeeded when faced with adversity, and the lessons they have learned can help college and universities respond as well. Unique recommendations and tips for success at responding to a critical incident are provided in this article, that are not brought up in the other materials I have reviewed, such as reconsidering the solution you have developed, preparing for surprises, and expecting political and turf skirmishes. However, the article focuses attention on the many successes this school experienced during a critical incident response and fails to acknowledge downfalls or obstacles the school and responders faced, which would be helpful in understanding how the responders came to learn the tips and lessons they are providing here.

Literature Related To Higher Education Critical Incident Response

“Creating and Maintaining Security on Campus” by David W. Polensky (2002), published in the *Facilities Manager* journal, describes the aspects of effective security programs during a critical incident response. This article focused on the details of setting up an effective security program on a college campus, specifically explaining the technology and logistics required to maintain security on campus including alarm systems, access control systems, closed circuit television systems, locks, and key control. Many articles focus on the “big picture” of a critical incident response and the human needs and communication. This article helps to give practical suggestions for the often-overlooked details of preparing for and preventing a critical incident.

Examples of “strategic response plans” or “response protocols” by various campuses within the United States were available through campus websites or various search engines, and were necessary for my understanding the current attitude and preparation for critical incident response within higher education. These campuses include those with both large and small student populations, public, private, and theological backgrounds, and rural and urban settings. Some of these include the *Huntington College Crisis Management Plan* from Huntington College (2004) in Huntington Indiana, the *Critical Incident Response Plan* from Minnesota West Community & Technical College (2003) located throughout Minnesota, the *Smith College Crisis Management Plan* from Smith College (2006) in Northampton, Massachusetts, the *Lake Superior College Emergency Response and Crisis Management Plan* from Lake Superior College (2005) in Duluth, Minnesota, and the *Critical Incident Management Plan* from Palm Beach Community College (2005) in Lake Worth, Florida.

I selected the strategic response plans above from those that are available to the public, with an emphasis on choosing plans from campuses with a small student population and those from a variety of geographic locations. While these materials do not address in-depth any of the reasoning or prioritizing behind the protocols created, they were critical in my seeing how campuses have planned for response efforts because they clearly outline elements of their response plans, such as evacuation procedures, identifying suspicious packages, and contact information for campus responders and medical and emergency services. Many of the protocols created put an emphasis on the immediate logistical needs of a variety of critical incident responses,

such as what steps to take when a responder encounters a suspicious letter or package, a chemical spill in a lab, a hostage situation, or bomb threats. While it is necessary to provide this information liberally around campus, very few of the protocols had any focus on the emotional or psychological aspects of responding to an incident, or acknowledged the unique character and requirements to each individual critical incident response.

One article that was particularly useful in my research was “What the Disaster Planning Lessons Didn’t Teach You” written by Julie Sturgeon (2002) for the *College Planning & Management* journal. This text describes in vivid detail the response efforts that happened on September 11, 2001, at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), which lies only three blocks away from Ground Zero. This article explains each step in the critical incident response, and addresses both strategies and decisions that were effective and ineffective. It was also an article that illustrated for me how much a college is responsible to the surrounding community and the importance of communities coming together to support and recover during a crisis, which informed the best practices I outlined within the response dimension on Public Relations, described in Chapter 5.

The text that most closely mirrored my own research goal is titled, “Bonfire Tragedy and Tradition” and was published in *About Campus* by interviewer John Wesley (2000). This transcript is of Wesley interviewing Texas A&M University associate vice president for student affairs Bill Kibler about his experience as the Bonfire advisor in 1999, when Texas A&M experienced a multiple fatality tragedy during their annual bonfire tradition. This article was very useful for my study for

several reasons. By lending a perspective of a student affairs professional who experienced a critical incident response in a vivid and insightful way, it has reinforced for me the value of collecting my research data through in-person interviews because of the depth of responses the interviewer received. It also provides examples of questions that were asked and the response they elicited during a data collection process very similar to my own. Some of these questions include inquiring about the response activity of the university administration within the first twenty-four hours after the accident, what happened in the days and weeks that followed, and aspects of the response that, in hindsight, responders could have handled differently. The responses elicited by these questions painted a detailed picture of what was done, step-by-step, and how the individual responders and those affected reacted. Some of the questions I generated for my own data collection were based directly on those illustrated in this article.

Perhaps the most comprehensive, and recent, guide to critical incident response specifically related to colleges and universities is “Crisis Management: Responding from the Heart” published by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), 2006. With chapters written by experienced student affairs professionals, this work includes information on establishing a crisis response team, spirituality in crisis response, articles written by parents, responders, supervisors, and others as well as “real-life examples” of crisis response on campus. This book lays a foundation of not only how to respond to a crisis as a professional, but also with sincerity, sensitivity, and empathy for everyone impacted. On many campuses the focus of critical incident response has been on the logistics and not on the needs and

feelings of the humans involved: the chapters of this text put an emphasis on the elements of humanity that come up during a response.

This work informed many of the response dimensions I created, including Human physical and psychological needs, Response plans, teams, and preparation, Returning and Recovering, and Diversity issues. These dimensions are further described in Chapter 5. The fact that the chapters are written by a variety of people who have experienced critical incident response first-hand establishes the information as more practical, realistic, and real than many of the guides created by government agencies or organizations. This text focused on certain aspects of a critical incident response, and did not address responding to a critical incident as a whole. While the intent of my research is not to encompass every aspect of a critical incident, it is to address a broader scope of critical incident response, through developing the set of nine dimensions of critical incident response as well as best practices for responding to critical incidents on a small college campus, as described in Chapter 5.

Relation Of Literature To My Research

While the literature detailed above is vital for colleges and universities critical incident response efforts, there is a definite lack of academic research on critical incident response, particularly that analyzes effective practices or focuses on college campuses with a small student population. I hope that my research will help to fill this gap and expand this ever-growing and extremely valuable body of knowledge.

In order to accomplish this and as a result of the literature review conducted, I originally outlined thirteen dimensions of critical incident response, which I will list and briefly describe. The development of each of these dimensions was informed by a

review of the related literature on that topic. The list of dimensions, dimension titles, and dimension descriptions did not come directly from one source in the literature. I developed this information based on the general terms, ideas, and information from a combination of many related resources, such as those described earlier in Chapter 2 and listed in the bibliography.

Dimension 1: Assessing and prioritizing

The dimension of Assessing and prioritizing focuses on aspects of a critical incident response such as assessing the location of a critical incident for risks or harm that has occurred, assessing a campus before a critical incident has occurred to evaluate if adequate preparation has occurred, and prioritizing response efforts both before and during a critical incident response. This dimension can include assessing the safety and security of campus members and campus property, assessing what risks a campus may be most vulnerable to, and taking steps to ensure that the safety and security of individuals involved in a critical incident are being addressed before other, secondary issues are dealt with.

Dimension 2: Human physical and medical needs

The dimension of Human physical and medical needs focuses on aspects of a critical incident response such as protecting campus and community members from physical harm and treating campus and community members for physical harm that has occurred. This dimension can include arranging for medical treatment of injured campus members, handling fatality situations, and considering response efforts such as evacuation and quarantining to protect campus and community members from further harm.

Dimension 3: Human emotional and psychological needs

The dimension of Human emotional and psychological needs focuses on aspects of a critical incident response that include addressing human emotional and psychological needs that may arise during and after a critical incident response happens, particularly in the case of critical incidents where some sort of trauma, loss, fatality, or disruption occurs. This dimension can include working with counseling and student support staff to address emotional and psychological issues for students, staff, faculty, critical incident responders, and community members.

Dimension 4: Legal implications

The dimension of Legal implications focuses on aspects of a critical incident response that require legal advice, counseling, or consideration, including cases where the campus is considering taking or facing possible legal action. Addressing this dimension can include understanding laws, regulations, and rules, the legal rights of individuals and groups on campus, protecting vital records, and protecting private property.

Dimension 5: Material/Structural Protection And Recovery

The dimension of Material/structural protection and recovery focuses on aspects of a critical incident response that involve risks or damage to campus, community, or private property and the role property may play in a response effort. This dimension can include considering response efforts such as evacuation, lockdown, or quarantining, acquiring security and emergency systems and supplies, protecting property when it is at risk of damage, and recovering property after damage has occurred.

Dimension 6: Community, media and government relations

The dimension of Community, media, and government relations focuses on aspects of a critical incident response that involve relationships and communication with the community, media, or government individual or groups. This dimension can include working with local police, fire, and hospital responders, and communicating with parents and the public during and after a critical incident response effort.

Dimension 7: Leadership in response

The dimension of Leadership in response focuses on aspects of a critical incident that require leadership from individuals or groups of campus or community members during a response effort. This dimension can include identifying and communicating leadership roles to all individuals involved in response efforts on a campus, creating a leadership hierarchy, and understanding how issues of power or territory may occur among responders.

Dimension 8: Inter-institutional communication and relationships

The dimension of Inter-institutional communication and relationships focuses on aspects of a critical incident that include any sort of communications or relationships that occur among campus members and campus responders before, during, or after a critical incident response. This dimension can include understanding the relationships among members of a critical incident response team, communication among campus responders before, during, and after a critical incident occurs, considering ways in which this communication will take place between campus members, and ways to strengthen relationships between campus responders.

Dimension 9: Information distribution

The dimension of Information distribution focuses on aspects of a critical incident that require the distribution of information to individuals or groups of people, including campus staff, faculty, or students, parents, donors, the media, and the outside community. This dimension can include addressing technology issues for distributing information, distributing response plans and emergency protocols to campus members or the public, working with the media to distribute information, keeping parents informed during a critical incident response effort, and considering privacy and confidentiality issues.

Dimension 10: Memorializing and honoring

The dimension of Memorializing and honoring focuses on situations after a critical incident has occurred that may require a memorializing and honoring response. This dimension can include memorializing and honoring after a critical incident where a fatality occurs, after a large-scale or national critical incident occurs that causes significant trauma or disruption, and considering which various options of memorializing and honoring are appropriate depending on the type and scale of incident.

Dimension 11: Recovering and returning

The dimension of Recovering and returning focuses on the critical incident response efforts that occur after other aspects of a critical incident have been addressed. This dimension can include the responders or response team debriefing after a critical incident has occurred, responding to needs and issues that may arise during the recovery process of campus and community members, and campus and

community members returning to normal activities after a disruption caused by a critical incident.

Dimension 12: Response plans and teams

The dimension of Response plans and teams focuses on aspects of a critical incident response that involve developing and maintaining strategic response plans and campus response teams before, during, and after a critical incident occurs. This dimension can include involving a variety of campus members in participating on a campus response team, developing strategic response plans before a critical incident occurs, training campus responders before a critical incident occurs, and how a campus response team will communicate and join together during a critical incident response effort.

Dimension 13: Cultural diversity issues

The dimension of Cultural diversity issues focuses on aspects of a critical incident response that involve working with individuals or groups from the campus or community that are diverse in culture, language, religion, physical disability, or other characteristics. This dimension can include considering how disability issues may need to be addressed during response efforts, communicating during a critical incident with students who speak a language other than the primary language used on campus, and addressing cultural differences that may occur during a critical incident response effort.

After developing the above thirteen dimensions of critical incident response from a review of the related literature, I then conducted the five interviews with participants, and used the interview data to create a final set of nine dimensions of

critical incident responders on a small college campus: (a) Response Plans, Teams, and Preparation, (b) Assessing and Prioritizing, (c) Human Physical and Psychological Needs, (d) Material and Structural Protection and Recovery, (e) Information Distribution, (f) Community Relations, (g) Legal Implications, (h) Diversity Issues, and (i) Recovering and Returning. Informed by the literature review and the interview data, I then developed a set of best practices within each one of the dimensions. A chart listing revised dimensions and best practices is included as Appendix D. Chapter 5 describes the revised nine dimensions and the set of best practices within each dimension. A chart comparing the original thirteen dimensions and the revised nine dimensions is included as Appendix E.

I determined the final nine dimensions of response as well as the best practices within each of these dimensions based on the frequency they appeared within the literature review and the interview data, as well as the emphasis put on the specific areas of critical incident response.

Chapter 3: Materials and Methods

Introduction and Research questions

When I began this research it was out of a belief in the importance of responding to critical incidents with sensitivity, empathy, leadership, and effective communication. Through my own experiences working with critical incident response at both a small, private institute and a large, public university I became curious about how to best respond to critical incidents on a campus with a small student population and what unique challenges and successes these campuses might face when responding.

As I began to research critical incident response on college campuses, I realized that there was a lack of academic research as well as a lack of information on the best practices specifically for responding to critical incidents on a campus with a small student population. I formed the following research question based on my own curiosities and the lack of material available on this topic: “What are effective practices for critical incident response on a college campus with a small population?”

My research took the form of a qualitative case study of one campus that has experienced different types of critical incidents in the past. The study, which will be discussed more in depth in this chapter, consisted of interviews with administrators in various departments, where I asked questions regarding their experiences and perceptions with critical incident response. I structured the data analysis around a set of thirteen response dimensions I developed in conjunction with various literature and research sources. These dimensions are discussed further in Chapter 4. The end

product of this research takes the form of a set of nine dimensions of critical incident response and a set of best practices within each dimension, both informed by the interview data and related literature.

My research was narrowed to critical incidents that happened in the past ten years in order to identify participants who have experienced critical incident response first-hand, and who still remember their involvements with critical incident response accurately.

Theoretical Framework

I have conducted the research from an interpretive social science approach, such as described by W. L. Neuman (2003) in the book “Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches”. Neuman explains that an interpretive approach to research, “is concerned with how ordinary people manage their practical affairs in everyday life, or how they get things done” (p. 76). He further explains that an interpretive approach is, in general, “the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds” (p. 76).

My research methods fit very clearly with the above description of an interpretive social science research approach. I chose to collect the data in a narrative form, through interviews with participants, for very specific reasons. In the text “Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research” (2005) John W. Creswell explains that some of the advantages of conducting interviews in qualitative research are, “that they provide useful

information when you cannot directly observe participants and they permit participants to describe detailed personal information. Compared to observations, the interviewer also has better control over the types of information received since you can ask specific questions to elicit this information” (p. 215).

When interviewing staff and faculty, I was able to gain insight into their lived experiences during response to critical incidents. Conducting interviews appeared to be the best way to achieve the necessary depth of their experiences and perceptions surrounding these incidents. Many of the topics included in critical incident response are of a subjective or personal nature, such as responding with sensitivity, honoring or memorializing victims, and communicating with the surrounding community.

Interviewing is having a conversation, is a way to connect more closely with the participants as well as providing me with the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, and work through sensitive issues or reluctance in order to gain accurate data. By performing in person, one-on-one interviews with the participants, during which they were asked to reflect on their experiences and perceptions of responding to critical incidents, I was better able to understand the reasoning and prioritizing individuals do during a critical incident response and to create best practices that are realistic and practical. In “Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research” (2005), John W. Creswell explains, “In qualitative research, you ask open-ended questions so that the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings. An open-ended response to a question allows the participant to create the options for responding” (p. 215).

It was important for me to consider the different bias and perceptions the participants may have, and acknowledge the room for human error and where trauma and emotions may enter into the data I collected. This can be counted as a limitation; however, for the purpose of this research it is important to consider these emotions and reactions as part of the data. Often, there are different perceptions, feelings, and reactions at the time of the critical incident that may have influenced how various staff and faculty responded. Responses to a critical incident are very individual and very human, and so considering this during data analysis allowed me to provide more practical suggestions and implications from a realistic point of view.

Methods

Approval was received for this research from the Institutional Review Board of Oregon State University, including approval of all recruitment materials, interview questions, and research methods. I have included a copy of application to the Institutional Review Board as Appendix A, B, and C.

Setting

The first stage of my research was to determine the criteria for the campus I would be researching. The criteria I set included that it be a campus with a small student population, within the Pacific Northwest region, and one that had experienced at least one critical incident within the past ten years. For the purpose of this study, I have defined a small student population as a campus having fewer than 6,000 students enrolled full-time for credit. I have chosen to evaluate campus size based on full-time, for-credit students because this is a statistic that is generally available from most colleges.

I chose to study a campus with a small student population based on the lack of information existing on this subject. While the related literature does not address the possible differences between critical incident response on a small college campus and a large college campus, almost the entirety of the body of related literature was written about or addressing critical incident response on a large college campus. The lack of literature, research, or information existing about critical incident response specifically on a small college campus showed a need for this topic to be addressed. I did not focus my research directly on the differences between critical incident response on a small college campus and a large college campus, because I believe that the real need is not information on the differences between the two types of campuses, but instead research on general critical incident response on a campus with a small student population. Response efforts at a small college campus may be different than those at a large college campus for several reasons, including the campus having fewer personnel, the personnel existing fulfilling several roles at the same time, and the possibility of there being less likelihood of an incident occurring because of there being fewer people on campus.

I chose to study a campus within the Pacific Northwest region for practical reasons; In order to conduct the interviews in person, and within my research budget, I needed to study a campus that I was able to easily access. The campus needed to have experienced a critical incident within the past ten years to better the chances that the participants would have been currently employed at the university at the time of the incident, and would be able to recall their experiences and perceptions regarding the critical incident response.

I chose to study only one campus in order to achieve the depth of information that is helpful in understanding a critical incident response. My intent was to identify effective practices for critical incident response at similar institutions, and to create a set of best practices to be used as a jumping off point for administrators to perform their own reflections and evaluations, and develop their own best practices and philosophies for response.

I created a list of campuses that fit within my research criteria and identified which campus was my first choice to study using purposeful sampling, described by Creswell (2005) as when researchers “intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (p. 204). I compiled this list based on research done through the Internet as well as by speaking with individuals in the field of higher education who are familiar with this type of campus and are aware of critical incidents that have taken place. I chose which campus to study based on several factors. The contact information of the participants was readily available, and I was aware that at least one critical incident had taken place within my established timeframe. I was relatively familiar with the campus in general; however I was not familiar with its critical incident response practices and so would be less inclined to make assumptions about the participants’ professional roles and experiences with response.

The campus studied is a college has a student population that includes both commuter and residential students. The region is subject to earthquakes and floods, and the campus has experienced both smaller and larger scale incidents including student death, student illness and injury, sexual assault, and theft as well as property damage from fire and vandalism. Campus Security generally serves as the first

responders to most critical incidents.

Participants

The participants that were involved in this research were five administrators currently employed at one campus with a small student population, within the state of Oregon that has experienced a variety of critical incidents. I selected participants based on their involvement with critical incident response at the campus I chose to study.

Due to the small size of the campus being studied, there were a limited number of administrators involved with critical incident response. I contacted nine administrators through mail to recruit them to participate in the form of one-on-one interviews, and then followed up through a series of email and phone conversations. Of these nine, I received a response from and was able to arrange for one-on-one interviews with five; however, the five participants I recruited worked in some of the positions and departments most involved with critical incident response on their campus.

Several of the participants held multiple roles and responsibilities on the campus studied, but responded from the point of view of the role from which they primarily responded to critical incidents.

At the time of this study, Participant A worked in Campus Safety and was typically one of the first responders to any critical incident that occurs on campus. Participant A had been working at the campus for less than five years.

Participant B held a position in Residence Life and had been working at the campus for more than ten years. Participant B was among one of the first responders

to many critical incidents, particularly those that occurred outside of normal campus hours and also worked as part of a team to develop response plans and protocols.

Participant C worked in the Office of the Chaplain and had been working at the campus for over twenty years. Participant C was often called to be part of the response team when incidents involved student death, injury or illness, or sexual assault as well as served as a liaison with student's parents or survivors.

Participant D worked in Counseling Services and had been working at the campus for more than 15 years. Participant D's role in critical incident response was primarily working with individuals impacted by a critical incident as well as working as part of a team to develop response plans and protocols and to develop educational opportunities around critical incident response.

Participant E held a position in Campus Life and had been working at the campus for more than five years. Participant E's role in critical incident response was largely "information receiving and information brokering." Most often, Participant E was briefed on the situation by others who served as first responders, asked for his input and advice, and then served as an intermediate between the first responders and the President, passing on information to upper administration as needed.

Data collection

Before beginning the data collection, I developed a set of questions on the topic of critical incident response on a small college campus to ask administrators who worked with response efforts. The development of these questions was informed by information from the literature review, discussions with administrators involved with critical incident response at Oregon State University, and my own experiences

working with critical incident response. The specific questions were developed based around the research and subsidiary questions for this study and were constructed to be open-ended and inclusive to administrators from different student services departments. I have included this set of questions in the Institutional Review Board Application, as Appendix C.

Prior to conducting the interviews with participants, I piloted the questions I had generated with Oregon State University administrators involved with critical incident response. Only minor changes were made to the original questions, including re-wording and altering sentence structure for clarity. The data collected by the piloting of the questions is not included in this research study.

After the five participants had been recruited and agreed to participate through signing the Informed Consent Document (included in the Institutional Review Board Application as Appendix B), I conducted in-person, one-on-one interviews with each of the participants. The interviews were semi-structured and comprised of open and closed-ended questions, generated by myself. The interviews were audio-recorded with both a digital audio recorder and a mini-cassette recorder with the consent of the participants. I chose to audio-record with both devices in case there was a technical malfunction with either of the recorders during the data collection. Each interview was conducted in a secure and private location, chosen by the participant.

While the questions I had generated were the guide for the conversation, I was flexible and remained open to new questions, topics related to critical incident response, and general discussion about the participants experiences and perceptions with critical incident response.

Data analysis

After the interviews were conducted, the data was transcribed using a professional transcription service, to which I submitted the audio records digitally, saved to CDs. I then analyzed the data to generate themes or patterns from the participants' responses using a process based off of Creswell's (2005) qualitative process of data analysis.

I completed the data analysis using the original thirteen dimensions of critical incident response I created during the literature review. In order to create the original thirteen dimensions, I thoroughly reviewed the literature related to the topic. This included reviewing the body of literature in its entirety multiple times, searching for themes to emerge within the literature that could be studied and then used as the framework for developing the original set of thirteen dimensions of critical incident response.

I then used the original thirteen dimensions I had developed as a framework for analyzing the interview data and creating the revised nine dimensions of critical incident response. As with Creswell's (2005) proposed process, I categorized the data themes and patterns based on the original thirteen critical incident response dimensions. I used the original thirteen dimensions as the framework for the data analysis as a way to test them against the interview data, in order to see where the interview data and the related literature differed. I began this by first completing a preliminary exploratory analysis of the research to obtain a general sense of what the data included. I then sorted through each comment made during each interview, and determined how it was or was not related to the original thirteen dimensions. Creswell

advises that when analyzing qualitative data, a researcher should initially read through text data, divide the text into segments of information, label the segments of information with codes, reduce overlap and redundancy of codes, and then collapse the codes into themes. (p. 238) I then reviewed where the interview data was or was not related to the original thirteen dimensions, and revised the dimensions based on this information.

The data collected from the interviews with the participants and literature review then informed a series of best practices for critical incident response on small college campuses, described within each of the final nine response dimensions. The revised dimensions and best practices are further explained in Chapter 5.

Assumptions

Throughout this research I strove to identify and alter when necessary any underlying assumptions I had about the research topic, or any related topics. These included my assumption that a campus needs to be prepared for a critical incident, which is much of the driving force behind my completing this research. I believe this based on the likelihood that most college campuses will experience some sort of critical incident, and that it is necessary to respond adequately to a critical incident in order to preserve the mission of colleges and universities, which is to provide a safe educational environment. I also am assuming that most campuses have experienced or will experience a critical incident at some point, and that administrators at most college campuses are interested in preparing for critical incidents.

I am assuming, in creating this set of best practices, that many small college campuses may have some similarities in their needs for responding to critical

incidents, although I acknowledge that many campuses may have as many, if not more, differences than similarities. I also assume that various departments are often impacted differently by critical incidents.

It is also my belief, and remains so, that it is the duty of student affairs professionals to respond to a critical incident, and work to protect the staff, faculty, students, campus and surrounding community to the best of their ability.

Limitations

There are multiple limitations I faced when conducting this research. Foremost, I was limited by not being able to study and conduct interviews at a large number of campuses. With unlimited time and resources, I would have studied many campuses and the perspectives and experiences of many participants. As I conducted a review of current literature available on this topic, I became aware that there are limited existing materials and information addressing this research topic, particularly a lack of academic and research materials. While this left plenty of questions for me to address in my research, the lack of other materials related to critical incident response on college campuses has made it more difficult for me to narrow down my own research topic. Another limitation I faced was the busy nature of my participants' careers and lack of time they had available for being involved in academic research.

I have also been limited in the amount of information and descriptions I was able to release in my research pertaining to the individual campus as well as specific critical incidents. In order to keep my data confidential at all times to protect the participants, I had to ensure that details and descriptive information used in this work did not compromise the confidentiality of my study. This meant excluding information

that could, at times, have been helpful in illustrating the importance, or practicalities, of some of the best practices I describe.

I strove to identify and control my own subjectivity and assumptions about preparedness, sensitivity, and critical incident response, whenever possible. As I generated the interview questions and analyzed the data I sought to understand and identify my own biases and remove them from the research, keeping in mind that it may never be possible to completely remove my own biases. I am aware that I have beliefs about the responsibility of student affairs professionals in addressing human emotional and psychological needs, as well as embracing different cultures on a college campus and considering their special needs during a critical incident response. This may differ from the philosophies of some of the participants, who may believe that these critical incident response dimensions are not the responsibility of student affairs professionals when responding to a critical incident or who may feel differently about diversity than I do. I tried to understand the different philosophies behind working in student affairs, and to remain aware that my own philosophy is just one of many.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter will provide an explanation for each of the original thirteen dimensions of critical incident response I developed based on the related literature, as well as describe the data received from the interviews I conducted with the five participants. More information on the data collection and analysis methods and the setting and participants is provided in Chapter 3.

As a result of the literature review conducted, I originally outlined thirteen dimensions of critical incident response: (a) assessing and prioritizing, (b) human physical and medical needs, (c) human emotional and psychological needs, (d) legal implications, (e) material/structural protection and recovery, (f) community, media, and government relations, (g) leadership in response, (h) inter-institutional communication and relationships, (i) information distribution, (j) memorializing and honoring, (k) recovering and returning, (l) response plans and teams, and (m) cultural diversity issues. These dimensions are meant to serve as a guiding tool for campus critical incident responders and other administrators to prepare for possible critical incident response situations.

The interview questions did not, for the most part, directly identify the dimensions or ask the participants to respond to them specifically. Rather, the interview questions were designed to elicit information about the experiences and perceptions the participants had in regards to critical incident response at the campus studied. The responses were then sorted to evaluate where the dimensions emerged or did not emerge within the data. I chose to code the data based on the dimensions I

developed as a way to see where the data did or did not support the related literature. All of the data was considered in developing the final set of nine dimensions of critical incident response and best practices within each dimension; regardless of whether or not it supported the original dimensions I developed from the literature. The dimensions are listed in the order originally presented, not in order of importance.

Dimension 1: Assessing and prioritizing

Several aspects of critical incident response involving assessing and prioritizing emerged from the data collected. Participant C was the only participant who did not discuss assessing the situation and prioritizing response efforts at the beginning of a response, due to the differences in his role within critical incident response. The other four participants all clearly identified the safety and security of students, staff, faculty, and the surrounding community as the first priority in any situation that involves a risk of harm. Participant D said, “Number one is the safety of the students and the community.”

Participants A and B mentioned ways in which they assess their campus for risks both before and during a critical incident response, such as Participant A explaining that what practices are effective when responding “depends on the incident,” and identified one risk to the campus that could become an issue during a critical incident. “Our campus is so open... The openness of it kind of lends us to be a possible target...” Participant A also recognized an issue with transients on campus, and explained that staff and faculty are trained “to be cognizant of people on campus.” Participant B said that the campus would be unprepared for large-scale incidents. “I don’t think we’d have a clue because we don’t experience those on a regular basis.”

All of the participants discussed how it is they go about prioritizing the steps of their response efforts. Participants A, B and E both cited common sense and judgment as the tools most used when prioritizing, over strategic response plans, with Participant B also citing Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (further explained in Chapter 5). Participants C and D both cited strategic response plans as the primary guide for prioritizing during a critical incident response.

Dimension 2: Human physical and medical needs

All of the participants except for Participant C directly cited the safety and security, of students in particular, as the top priority in response to any critical incident, with Participant D identifying safety of the general community as a close second in priority. Unique responses came from Participant A and B. Participant A, when asked what ethical challenges he had faced during a critical identified handling the bodies of individuals who have passed away, especially during an incident involving multiple fatalities.

Participant B mentioned several other ways in which human physical and medical needs might require attention during a critical incident, including handling mold or mildew which may cause illness after floods or other natural disasters, working with individuals who are intoxicated, working with individuals with physical disabilities that affect a response effort, and quarantining individuals to protect others during an infectious disease outbreak.

Dimension 3: Human emotional and psychological needs

Four of the participants spoke about the need to address human emotional and psychological needs during a critical incident response. Participant A explained, "If

they're okay physically, now we have to make sure that they're okay mentally too."

Early on in our conversation, Participant B explained that one issue during a critical incident could be disruption to a social network. "[a critical incident that damaged a residence hall and displaced students] was very disruptive. All these people knew each other, were connected and then all the sudden they're spread out all over the place."

Participant B also stressed the importance of helping students "cope psychologically" and identified the need for responders "emotionally processing" what occurred after an incident. Participant C spoke in-depth about dealing with loss, a primary part of his role with critical incident response. Participant D, the participant who works most closely with psychological needs of students, identified debriefing after an incident occurs as an important part of a response effort, however cautions that debriefing is, "not appropriate for everybody... [Individuals involved are] just invited to sit down and talk about the situation, but we would never force anybody to sit down and talk about it... We also educate people about, if you've been through some kind of a trauma, here are some possible things that you might experience. Now, if it goes beyond a certain point then maybe you ought to consider coming in for counseling."

Dimension 4: Legal implications

The possible legal implications of critical incident responses were only addressed briefly by two Participants E and D, both in reference to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and privacy and information regulations. Participant E said, "I think our protocol has been to notify parents even at the risk of sometimes - there's ambiguity about FERPA violations. And our policy on that is to notify and worry about the FERPA violation later." Participant D explained, "you

weigh the seriousness of the situation for this individual student versus their right to privacy, versus the parents' kind of nature and sometimes legal interest in knowing about that. And I think that's an ethical challenge."

There were areas of legal issues that were identified in the literature, but which were omitted in the interview data. These include protecting vital records, protecting private property of individuals, such as students residing on campus, and potential litigation a college may face after a critical incident occurs.

Dimension 5: Material/structural protection & recovery

Three of the participants spoke about a variety of ways in which material and structural protection and recovery factor into a critical incident response. Participant A emphasized that the protection of property is secondary to the protection of people during a critical incident and spoke about the importance of having a system to evacuate and lock down buildings immediately when necessary, to protect both individuals and property and also pointed out that the location of emergency supplies should be carefully considered to ensure they are accessible during a variety of critical incidents. When asked about what ethical challenges responders face during an incident, Participant E identified having to choose which buildings to protect first as one of the challenges, but did not explain how he would ultimately do this.

Participant B spoke several times about response efforts involving material and structural elements. This included noting how long it can take to rebuild campus property after a critical incident and all of the stages and funds that go into that. She also explained the health issues that can result from a contamination to property including mold, mildew, and sewage water, and the alterations to buildings that need

to be undertaken for response to an infectious disease outbreak such as separate ventilation systems and bathrooms for quarantined students. The need to arrange for alternative spaces to serve as classrooms and living quarters was also identified by Participant B. Participants C and D did not address this dimension.

Dimension 6: Community, media & government relations

All of the participants in some way mentioned relationships with the community, media, or government. Participants B, D and E each spoke primarily about communication with parents and the general community. Participant C explained that a campus without a religious consultant or chaplain could turn to the outside community to find support from religious officials.

Participant A addressed this dimension the most, focusing on working with local responders in the community such as police and fire workers and how to go about communicating with them during critical incidents. Participant A also identified how a campus is arranged in relation to an urban setting as a factor that can affect critical incident response and work with the community, emphasized the importance of communicating with the public, and explained that working with a local hospital is important during critical incidents where injuries or fatalities occur.

Dimension 7: Leadership in response

Leadership roles in relation to critical incident response were addressed by all participants except for Participant C. The four participants who addressed this dimension all identified the best practices in leadership roles as having “a clear sense of who is responsible” as Participant E stated, and for each responder to have an understanding of his own roles and responsibilities when responding to a critical

incident. The unique responses came from Participants B and D. Participant B also cited “documenting people’s roles and responsibilities” as an important part of establishing leadership in critical incident response, explaining, “Staff on this campus have been here for a long time and they had a lot of information in their head. And they didn’t need to write it down because they’ve been here forever and they know what to do” and when a staff member suddenly leaves they can take all of that valuable knowledge and experience with them. Participant D emphasized the importance of dividing up the labor and responsibilities during a critical incident response, explaining that responders can become territorial about their roles and responsibilities. Participant D explained that this is because, “people feel such a personal sense of responsibility to the institution. You really feel attached to the mission or the school or to the students so they’ll really go out of their way to try to help without sometimes stopping to look at what’s the bigger plan here.”

Dimension 8: Inter-institutional communication and relationships

All of the participants except for Participant A spoke about inter-institutional communication and relationships. Participant C mentioned the need to take advantage of various professionals and services on campus during a critical incident response, and explained the importance of getting a wide group of helpful people on campus involved, especially people who can be available for response outside of regular business hours. Participant E identified having a good reporting system in place for first responders, particularly student resident assistants and to be prepared for responders to be out of town or unreachable during a critical incident and breakdowns in communication that can result, which was also mentioned by Participant B.

Participants D's and B's responses both centered around building up strong relationships and connections between responders, knowing each others strengths and weaknesses, staying in communication, and putting aside personal or territorial issues with each other.

Dimension 9: Information distribution

Each participant spoke in some way about information distribution during and/or after a critical incident. Participants A and B both spoke primarily about the logistics of distributing information when technology fails, specifically in the case of a natural disaster where cell phones, landlines, and the internet may not be accessible. Participant A also cited the need to work with the media to distribute information and to keep them aware of the situation. Participant B emphasized the importance of making emergency procedures accessible in staff manuals and student handbooks and also that information that is distributed to the public be authorized by a department or individual to guard against wrong or misleading information being released. Participants B and D both spoke about keeping parents informed about a situation as it occurs, through the media and emergency call centers, and the of a critical incident on student's loved ones. Participant D also advised that parents and the community should receive an explanation of what information the college can and cannot release and why.

The most unique responses came from Participant C, who explained that one duty of his position was to provide information and assistance for those who would like to honor or provide support for injured individuals or survivors through cards, flowers, or donations and Participant E who identified providing information to the

broader community as something that should come towards the end of a response effort and be carefully thought out in order to only release necessary information. This response was unique because while the dimension of information distribution was frequently identified in the related literature and other interviews with participants, the idea of timing the information distribution was never mentioned.

Dimension 10: Memorializing and honoring

Participant C was the only participant to directly speak to the dimension of memorializing and honoring after a critical incident response. Participant C identified best practices about coordinating memorial services, working specifically with traditionally aged undergraduate students, and methods for responding to smaller scale incidents. These included understanding the demographic you are working with during a response effort, and identifying a specific individual to serve as the main contact and information center for answering questions related to any memorial services occurring.

Dimension 11: Recovering and returning

Participants A, B, and D mentioned recovering and returning after a critical incident. Participant A identified the need to debrief as soon as possible after a critical incident in order to recover, however Participant D emphasized that individuals involved in a response effort should not be forced to debrief if it will cause them harm in the recovery process. Participant D also identified the need for administrators to “keep doors open” during the recovery process after a critical incident. Participant B spoke several times during the interview about the importance of recovering and returning, particularly in reference to getting students back to academics and returning to “normal” as soon as possible and administrators debriefing and “emotionally

processing” after a response effort. Participant B also explained that the recovery process can go on for quite a long time, particularly when long-term illness or injury occurs and the incident is drawn out over a time period.

Dimension 12: Response plans and teams

Much of the discussions with each of the participants centered on developing and maintaining response plans and teams. Most of the responses focused on the importance of training for responders, funding for staff and supplies, building strong relationships between responders, preparing for larger scale incidents, debriefing as a response team after a critical incident, and the role of emergency protocols or strategic response plans during a critical incident response. These will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 5.

Dimension 13: Cultural diversity issues

While cultural and diversity issues were mentioned occasionally in the literature I reviewed, only Participants B and C spoke to this dimension of critical incident response at all. Participant B said, “We have a group of [students from a foreign country] and generally their English skills are quite good but sometimes, especially in an emergency, if they’re not being understood well or understanding, it can be very scary.” Participant B also mentioned evacuating people with disabilities as something that needs to be taken into consideration during some response efforts. Participant C spoke about working with students in a religious or spiritual way after an incident, and explained that there needs to be an effort to, “try not to represent a particular theological perspective if that’s not the one that’s important to the people that I’m talking to.”

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter will provide explanations of the revised nine dimensions of a critical incident response as well as describe within each dimension a set of best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus.

The purpose for this research was to create a comprehensive set of dimensions of a critical incident response and a guide of best practices based on the original set of dimensions that I developed from reviewing the literature. There were originally thirteen dimensions that I developed related to the initial literature review: (a) Assessing and prioritizing, (b) Human physical and medical needs, (c) Human emotional and psychological needs, (d) Legal implications, (e) Material/structural protection and recovery, (f) Community, media, and government relations, (g) Leadership in response, (h) Inter-institutional communication and relationships, (i) Information distribution, (j) Memorializing and honoring, (k) Recovering and returning, (l) Response plans and teams, and (m) Cultural diversity issues.

Several of these dimensions evolved as I analyzed the data, for a variety of reasons. The dimension of Community, media, and government relations was changed in name to the dimension of Public Relations. As I analyzed the data, I realized that the relationships outside of the campus were not limited to those with the surrounding community, media, or government but included local responders, donors, parents and partners of students, and others. The title of Community Relations felt more inclusive of the many relationships a campus builds and relies on during critical incident response. I also changed the title of the dimension of Cultural diversity issues to be

titled the dimension of Diversity issues. This change was also made to include a broader group of people. The term “cultural” may not always be attributed to people with disabilities or other groups who add to the diversity of a population.

A large portion of the interviews focused on preparing for a critical incident, and some of this preparation extended past developing formal response plans and teams. For this reason I changed the dimension of Response plans and teams to be the dimension of Response plans, teams, and preparation in order to include more of this information. I also incorporated the dimension of Leadership in response into the dimension of Response plans, teams, and preparation because the vast majority of data on leadership was given in reference to roles in response teams. The dimension of Human physical and medical needs and the dimension of Human emotional and psychological needs were condensed into the dimension of Human physical and psychological needs. There was overlap between the dimensions, despite the obvious differences in the response needs for these two aspects of critical incident response. Both of these dimensions dealt with a response to human need, and both were identified as some of the first aspects to be addressed during a response effort.

While the name of the dimension of Recovering and returning was not changed, I incorporated the original dimension of Memorializing and honoring into it and eliminated it as a separate dimension. When speaking with the participants, memorializing and honoring was mentioned solely in relation to the aspects of recovering and returning after a critical incident response.

The revised set of dimensions and the best practices I have developed based on the research are not listed in a set chronological order. I loosely ordered the

dimensions related to how the participants placed the dimensions in terms of priority during a critical incident response, not by a set order of importance. Each critical incident is unique and will require individual prioritization and assessment, as described in the dimension of Assessment and Prioritizing, below. The order in which I have set the dimensions should not be used directly to prioritize response efforts at other campuses, but has been established for the purpose of ease of reading and transitions in the writing.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to discussing the nine newly revised dimensions of critical incident response that were developed related to this research and providing suggestions for best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus. Within the description of the revised dimensions and best practices for response, I reference experiences that have occurred on other college campuses, including those with large student populations, as well as within elementary and secondary educational institutions. While these institutes may not be small college campuses, I have only referenced them where I think that the ideas, opinions, and experiences are transferable to a college campus with a small student population.

Many of the best practices I describe overlap among several of the dimensions of a critical incident response that I have developed. Aspects of critical incident response such as general planning, preparation, or communication are important in almost step of a response effort and relate to almost every dimension of critical incident response. I have tried to address the specific elements within each one of these aspects and detail those within the dimension. I have tried to fit each best

practice into the dimension it is most related to, and to acknowledge where overlap occurs.

Dimension 1: Response Plans, Teams, And Preparation

There are a variety of steps a campus must undergo in order to effectively respond to a critical incident, including developing clear and in-depth strategic response plans, forming a Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT), providing adequate training to campus responders, and acquiring the equipment and staff needed. This will require collaboration with various departments throughout the campus, time and energy of administrators, and adequate funding.

Within this dimension, the following ten best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus will be discussed within the context of the research findings and the related literature: (a) form a Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT), (b) develop clear and in-depth strategic response plans, (c) acquire adequate funds, staff, and equipment, (d) provide adequate training for campus responders, (e) consider ways to foster successful relationships among responders, (f) clearly define, document, and communicate the roles and responsibilities of responders, (g) have a diverse combination of responders involved, (h) meet regularly to discuss and communicate, (i) remain flexible in plans, protocols, and meeting times during times of response, and (j) emphasize leadership in response efforts.

- **Form a Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT).**

One of the first and most important steps for any campus to become adequately prepared for critical incident response is to form a team of responders, usually comprised of staff and faculty from various campus departments and services.

Suggestions for whom to include in a CIRT are further discussed in the best practice, “Have a diverse combination of responders involved”, described below. The role of a Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) was a frequently part of the discussions with each of the participants. Several of the participants explained that they would feel more confident in future response efforts if they had a comprehensive response team that met regularly. While all of the participants were very involved in critical incident response efforts on their campus, several of the participants were not confident whether or not there was a response team that met regularly, and were unsure how many different teams might exist or what topics they were focused on. Every staff or faculty member on a campus, particularly campus responders, should be aware of the existence of any response teams as well as the purpose of the teams. This team should meet not only to create plans and preparations for future critical incidents, but also to frequently touch base during a response effort and to follow up after a response effort has taken place.

- **Develop clear and in-depth strategic response plans.**

Having a strategic response plan or protocol was a part of each of the interviews with participants. While two of the presenters were unsure if one existed and others did not know the extent of the plan, four of the presenters spoke about the importance of creating plans before a critical incident occurs. From the interview data, I gathered that the participants felt that a response plan should clearly provide information to assist responders in both general and specific critical incident response situations, but should be flexible enough to fit the unique characters of each critical incident.

How the plan is circulated depends on the options available on campus. At the campus studied, campus responders were provided with a copy of the response plan in their staff manuals. A different version with a response plan and tips for students is provided in the student handbook. Including the response plans in an already established and distributed text is a good way to encourage campus members to review the information.

Before a campus begins developing in-depth critical incident response plans or teams, it is important that the responders evaluate what preparations and plans already exist on campus in order to avoid confusion or overlap. During the interviews with the participants, several participants expressed confusion over whether or not a strategic response plan existed at their campus, while the others knew of the existence of one as well as its location. This can lead to confusion not only during discussions before a critical incident occurs, but when a campus is in the midst of a response effort.

Administrators who are preparing their campus for critical incident response should also consider what preparations and plans might have existed in the past. If plans or preparations existed at one point and are no longer in use, it is important for current responders to understand why they were developed in the past, what did and not work about the preparations, and why they were ultimately altered or left behind.

In order for a campus to be fully prepared, strategic response plans should include preparation for large-scale and national critical incidents. Participant B noted that the campus studied had not yet developed plans for large-scale incidents. This sort of planning might require more staff time and funds, but is important to be considered

by a CIRT, particularly for those incidents to which the campus is particularly vulnerable, such as earthquakes or floods.

When a CIRT is considering what types of critical incidents for which to prepare, members should not limit their discussion only to incidents that occur on campus and directly involve students, staff, or faculty. Participant C spoke about the effect of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center Towers and the Columbine shootings that occurred in 1999. While incidents of this type may not occur nearby or affect members of the campus or their loved ones directly, they can still have an impact on individuals on campus. A response may be needed, although it may take a different form than one for a critical incident that occurs on campus.

- **Acquire adequate funds, staff, and equipment.**

When asked what, if they could have any wish, they would want in order to further prepare their campus for future critical incidents, funds was cited by three of the participants. Adequate funding is necessary for many aspects of critical incident response, including the salaries for staff and security to respond, emergency equipment, and ongoing training for responders. “Funding for equipment would be a number one,” said Participant B. Participant A explained further, “Money - money is always a big one because to get the proper training, that takes money and there are not enough funds to go around. We can always look for grants but you know, they only go for a short period of time and only train a few... so I think that there needs to be money made available for the training and the supplies that we need to handle critical incidents.”

Participant B pointed that before you decide where to distribute funds for

critical incident response, you must first allocate funds for that purpose. There is no exact figure suggested in the literature to guide fund allocate for critical incident response. This is a decision that will need to be made by a Critical Incident Response Team, or other group of administrators with the authority to distribute funds. Depending on whether a campus is particularly vulnerable to crimes on campus or natural disasters, some campuses may want to earmark more money for critical incident response than others.

In order to decide how the funding should be distributed, it is necessary to evaluate and consider the many aspects that comprise the campus, such as the campus layout, the types of academic departments and laboratories existing, the geographic location, and the risks the campus is most likely to experience. After evaluating the specific character of the campus studied, Participant A identified a problem as, “Our lack of security officers... I don’t think is adequate to give the proper coverage. Our campus is so open.” Participant D cited one of the biggest challenges she faces as a responder being, “Not feeling I have enough staff to respond to the students who are in need.” For a campus that is well contained or services that are underutilized, the critical incident response preparation needs could be quite different.

The assessment of fund allocation and staffing and equipment needs for critical incident response should not take place just once. Participant B questioned whether having a set amount of money earmarked for critical incident response each year would be a wise method of maintaining preparedness. “There are lots of high priorities to spend money on and, you know, it’s a gamble. If we put \$5,000 a year into emergency supplies and we never need it, think of what we could have done with that

money. On the other hand, if comes along once every 50 years, we sure needed it then.” These assessments will have to be made carefully, and there is more time to do so before a critical incident is actually taking place.

There are many emergency preparedness supplies available for critical incident response that involves property damage or infectious disease. Participant B listed off some of the possible supplies to keep in stock: blankets, drum barrels of clean, potable water, safety helmets, flashlights, radios, axes, equipment for rescuing people buried in rubble, saws, medical equipment, cots, portable waste facilities, body bags, and a black board for communicating when technology is not available. Before investing a large sum of money into emergency preparedness supplies, it is important to consider what a specific campus needs based on its own, unique characteristics. Special supplies are available for earthquake response, flooding, and other specific critical incidents.

- **Provide adequate training for campus responders.**

When asked to list some of the major challenges campus responders face, a frequent answer was the lack of training for staff and faculty on critical incident response. Participant A explained that one of the changes he would most like to see on campus would be, “Better training for everybody on campus to respond to a critical incident, whether it’s a flood or a threat of loss of life.” Every staff or faculty member who is directly involved with critical incident response should receive training, usually done regularly as a group, on a variety of topics related to response efforts. What the training topics include depends on the individual campus’s needs, but can include scenario-driven training, emergency first-aid training, and much more.

Participant D noted the need to, “be sure to train in and orient new people as they are hired, because there are certain positions in universities that tend to turn over every two to three years and often times those are kind of high-touch positions.” This is important to consider, and is another reason why training and reviewing of strategic response plans should be done regularly, once a year or more frequently when possible.

One form of training for responders can come in the form of “scenario-driven training” as two of the participants pointed out. Scenario-driven training (training during which responders move through the motions of a critical incident scenario to consider each individual step and aspect of the critical incident that would be encountered) was a frequent subject in all of the literature I reviewed on the subject of critical incident response in educational settings. The article “Emergency 101” by Susan J. Grosse (2001) explained, “After staff members have had a chance to become familiar with the emergency procedures chart, a scenario discussion will facilitate their understanding and retention of the procedures. Using scenarios to reinforce emergency procedures brings the paper plan to life” (pp. 56 – 57). It may be beneficial for professionals or local emergency responders to be present during scenarios or drills, as advised by the article, “School Safety After 9/11” by Garry W. McGiboney (2003). “Our practice drills have been observed by emergency experts and the news media. The emergency experts critique the evacuations, and the media report on the drills, reassuring parents and the community” (p. 64).

- **Consider ways to foster successful relationships among responders.**

Part of convening a successful CIRT is ensuring that there are successful

relationships and dynamics between responders. Participant B said, “It’s very easy to work with somebody who you know well and they know you well and you can move much quicker with a greater sense of ease or confidence about this is where this person is skilled.” Participant B went on to explain that a CIRT needs to work like a soccer game with a small group of people – everyone has to be join in the game order for the game to work. The leaders of the CIRT should consider ways to foster these types of relationships, understanding that it takes time to build true connections and trust between any groups of individuals. This can be done by performing team-building exercises as well as spending time together as a team, and ensuring that the team members are familiar with each other and their roles and responsibilities. Aspects of leadership in response efforts are further described in the best practice, “Emphasize leadership in response efforts”, below.

- **Clearly define, document, and communicate the roles and responsibilities of responders.**

The roles and responsibilities of responders being clearly defined and well known was something two of the participants identified as a very important part of preparing for a response effort. Participant B also identified a need for responders to document their roles and responsibilities so that they can be communicated to others, particularly during job turnover. This can be done by keeping a detailed catalog of what positions are involved in critical incident response and what responsibilities they hold, detailing how they meet these responsibilities, what departments or services they are in partnership with, as well as what practices they have developed for staying on top of current issues, meeting regularly, or working as a team. Both Participant B and

D spoke about the importance of responders not “going around in circles” or becoming territorial about their roles in response. Understanding who to turn to in the case of specific situations as well as clearly articulating who will be responsible and in leadership positions for different aspects of a critical incident response should be decided and communicated clearly to everyone involved in critical incident response before an incident takes place.

- **Have a diverse combination of responders involved.**

A college campus is comprised of staff and faculty from a variety of backgrounds, skills, and expertise and so should a CIRT be. Participant C said that it is important for a college to be

able to take advantage of all the various professional people that are on campus...counseling, campus safety, you know, the various folks that might be helpful in a situation like that. I don't think in the incidents I can remember, has there ever been a lone ranger or a one-person answer to anything. Usually a bunch of people work together on it.

While Participant C pointed out that his confidence in future critical incident response efforts stems from having people with experience involved with the response efforts, I think it is important to note that some positions have high turnover rates, as Participant D explained, and that there are times, such as when a new Residence Hall Director has first been hired, when individuals with little or no experience with critical incident response will need to be included in response planning and efforts. A combination of local professional responders, seasoned campus responders, and any other individuals involved in response on campus should be included for a well-

rounded response team.

A CIRT should also look outside of the traditional responders for assistance with response efforts. While the CIRT should be limited to those responders most involved in critical incident response, they do not have to be the only individuals assisting with the response effort as a whole. Participant A said that students had, in the past, joined together to help with the manual labor aspect of a critical incident response that damaged campus property, and Participant B spoke about involving student groups in the decision-making process for distributing funds to students who lost property during a critical incident. Participant E mentioned a group of students who are trained as Emergency Medical Technicians who help to respond in the case of injuries or death. Texas A&M University worked with students after a fatal bonfire collapse. “And of course, the response wasn’t limited to professional staff. Our students organized a campus wide memorial service in our agenda on the evening of the first day. Staff worked in concert with them” (Lowery, 2000, p. 23).

Administrators in charge of organizing a response should carefully consider whether or not to include students in response efforts, and legal counsel can be consulted to be sure that it is the best decision for the campus.

- **Meet regularly to discuss and communicate.**

One of the aspects of a successful CIRT most frequently mentioned by the participants had to do with the entire team meeting regularly to discuss and review a variety of topics related to critical incident response. CIRTs should not just meet during a critical incident, but on a regular, perhaps monthly, basis. Regular meetings will allow for trainings, assessments, and updates on recent critical incidents.

Some of the participants did not know if a strategic response plan was in place or not, and this included some of the first responders. Everyone on campus that is involved with a critical incident response should be aware of the existence of any plans, and should be familiar with them. The participants also mentioned the need to keep the plan up-to-date and revising it regularly as it is being reviewed by responders. Participant E identified a best practice of critical incident response as being, “if we periodically had reviews of the plan and we had copies of it more fully circulated and digested.”

Regular meeting times should be used to consider what work can be done before a critical incident occurs. In the book “Crisis Management: Responding from the Heart,” (2006) a crisis management plan prioritizes the steps of a critical incident response effort as first prevention and strategy, then planning, then response, then recovery, and then learning. As this plan illustrates, while much of the assessing and prioritizing of a response occurs at the beginning of an incident, there is a lot of work that can be done before an incident is in progress. This includes assessing what risks the campus may be vulnerable to experiencing. For instance, Participant A identified that the campus studied faces risks from earthquakes and transients, and preventative measures were being taken against these.

Some aspects of a critical incident will not need to be addressed right away, making room for responders to focus on circumstances that could cause harm to people or property. “If there’s someone who’s done something they shouldn’t have done that contributed to the critical incident, we’ll deal with that after we’ve handled the emergency. Unless there’s been a sexual assault and somebody has to be removed

from campus,” Participant B explains. Participant E said, “I think that you deal with the problem at hand. Somebody’s threatening suicide you deal with that person and then inform appropriate authorities. I would just put a premium on addressing the problem and its initial phases, and then worry about vertical and lateral communications later.”

Meeting regularly also helps responders stay on top of current and developing risks and issues. Several of the participants interviewed noted that the campus studied has been developing a strategic plan for possible pandemic flu outbreaks. While no strategic plan can address any possible incident, there may be some overlap between plans for different incidents. For instance, the preparations for a pandemic flu outbreak may be similar to the preparations for any other another infectious disease outbreak, and general protocols for all related critical incidents can be established. Also, the act of creating a plan to address one specific incident can help a CIRT learn to make decisions and think through the process of responding to other incidents. Participant B explained, “Most of the time, we’re more focused on avian flu but we’re also recognizing that the preparations we make for the avian flu will serve us well for any other type of emergency.”

- **Remain flexible in plans, protocols, and meeting times during times of response.**

During a critical incident, the amount of times a CIRT, or a portion of a CIRT, convenes should be flexible and changed to meet the needs at that time. Participant B said, “Then there are times if it’s a longer term incident, we’re meeting probably a couple times a day with people from critical offices” and went on to explain,

“sometimes it’s in the middle of the night and we’re standing out here on the sidewalks saying ‘Well, what do we need to do first.’” Responders, especially first responders, should be prepared to be available outside of business hours until the critical incident is under control.

The act of meeting as a response team does not always need to be a lengthy or official act. Many critical incidents will require almost immediate response, and therefore will not allow time for responders to meet as a group beforehand and discuss at length response strategies. Find any possible and reasonable opportunity to meet as a group, Participant B advises. “We don’t have any protocol that says we’re first going to address this and then this. It just comes naturally as we’re talking, and sometimes it’s in the middle of the night and we’re standing out here on the sidewalks saying well, what do we need to do first.”

Participant E emphasized that with strategic plans the “danger is potential inflexibility... you have to build in some flex and you have to build in places where key people make judgments in terms of the situation.” A strategic response plan should be a guide, not a document restricting actions to only those which are clearly outlined on paper.

Response plans and protocols should be used as guides. Responders should tailor response efforts to each campus and incident. Planning for a critical incident response is different at each campus, and can range in form from informal discussions among administrators to complex, detailed strategic response plans outlining specific actions for response to a variety of critical incidents. How formal, lengthy, or detailed a response plan is should depend on a college’s needs and where they are in

organizing their critical incident response preparation. Evaluate and consider the many aspects that make up a campus.

- **Emphasize leadership in response efforts.**

In order for a response team to run efficiently and address the many aspects of a critical incident response, leadership needs to be established early on in the process. While none of the participants stated any criteria for who should be established as leaders of a response effort, several of the participants emphasized that knowledge of who is in charge of a response effort should be clear and widespread. This can save time and wasted effort during a response, when responders may need to reach response leaders quickly in order to make decisions in a timely manner.

Those given special authority of decision-making power during a critical incident response should understand the importance of their roles, and be sure to be available when needed, outside of regular business hours and at the last minute when a real emergency occurs. Participant B explained that during one particular critical incident difficulty arose, “because a couple of our key individuals were on the other side of the country. It was difficult because they were the ones who had budget authority to authorize purchase of equipment and things that we needed and we couldn’t get a hold of them easily.” Special plans and provisions need to be in place for when leaders of a critical incident response are unreachable or not able to assist in response for a time, with backup plans decided in advance to ensure that other responders will be able to step up and take on their duties.

Leadership is not limited to just those individuals in official roles of leading the overall CIRT or individual response effort. Each responder would do well to

exhibit leadership within his or her individual roles and responsibilities. This leadership requires that responders be ready and able to make decisions, sometimes when pressed for time, know when to turn to others for help or expertise, and be understanding and sensitive when working with others. As Participant E explained, in a critical incident you need “to have people who can judge well – I think that’s important.”

Dimension 2: Assessing And Prioritizing

No matter how prepared a campus is there will still be many decisions and assessments to be made at the moment a critical incident occurs. First responders will need to assess the situation and then prioritize their efforts before jumping into a response.

Within this dimension, the following three best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus will be discussed within the context of the research findings and the related literature: (a) remember that the safety and security of individuals is the top priority, (b) acknowledge the role of common sense and intuition in response efforts, and (c) consider Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Needs.

- **Remember that the safety and security of individuals is the top priority.**

All of the five participants stated, unequivocally, that the safety and security of students, staff, and faculty is the first thing to be addressed. This extends to all critical incident response efforts, at all times and should be the guiding principle around which all strategic plans, teams, and preparations are built. In the case of natural or large-scale disasters or crimes on campus where the physical well being of individuals

may be at risk, the first step is always ensure the individuals safety before protecting property or possessions.

- **Acknowledge the role of common sense and intuition in response efforts.**

Through my discussions with the participants, it became clear that the decisions made in regards to prioritizing response efforts do not usually come from a strategic response plan or emergency manual, but rather from the responder's own common sense and intuition. When asked how they would prioritize what aspects of a critical incident to respond to first, three of the participants identified "common sense" or "intuition" as the primary basis for prioritizing a response. Participant A explained, "Common sense is probably your best line. If you use common sense you're probably going to take care of the matter more efficiently than if you sat down and thought 'Well, maybe I should go do this first.'"

It is important that responders acknowledge that this is a force behind their assessment and prioritization, and that it is a valid basis for decision-making. This is also something that should be understood and communicated about during critical incident response training. While strategic response plans and scenario-driven training are important tools for a campus to be adequately prepared, they cannot possibly be written to fit every unique circumstance and specific situation that arises, and this is where common sense and intuition become necessary.

However, when speaking about the method of depending almost solely on common sense while responding, Participant B warns, "We've been very fortunate. I think if it gets to a bigger incident, it's not going to come as easily." While common sense and intuition will always be necessary tools for a responder when addressing a

critical incident, response efforts need to be based on a combination of common sense with previously agreed to teams, leadership, and strategic response plans. While there are many individual and unique elements to each critical incident, many incidents will share some predictable aspects that can be assessed and planned for in advance by campus administrators.

- **Consider Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs.**

Participant B identified another source to assist responders in prioritizing what aspects of a critical incident to address first: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Abraham Maslow (1954) developed a theory of human motivation based on a hierarchy of needs, beginning with the basic needs: physiological needs, then needs for belongingness and love, then esteem needs, and then the need for self-actualization. Maslow explained, "A person who is lacking food, safety, love, and esteem would most probably hunger for food more strongly than for anything else... For the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food" (p. 37). After a basic need is met, "At once other (and higher) needs emerge and these, rather than physiological hungers, dominate the organism. And when these in turn are satisfied, again new (and still higher) needs emerge, and so on" (p. 38)

According to Maslow, an individual is ready to act upon the growth needs if and only if the deficiency needs are met... Maslow's hierarchy can be used to describe the kinds of information that individual's seek at different levels. For example, individuals at the lowest level seek coping information in order to meet their basic needs. Information that is not directly connected to helping a person meet his or her needs in a very short time span is simply left

unattended. Individuals at the safety level need helping information. They seek to be assisted in seeing how they can be safe and secure. Enlightening information is sought by individuals seeking to meet their belongingness needs. Quite often this can be found in books or other materials on relationship development. Empowering information is sought by people at the esteem level. They are looking for information on how their ego can be developed. Finally, people in the growth levels of cognitive, aesthetic, and self-actualization seek edifying information. (Huitt, 2004, ¶ 2 - 4)

While this theory is actually a theory of human motivation, and was not created directly with critical incident response in mind, it clearly relates to it. When an incident has occurred that affects a group of students, for instance, they will need to have their basic needs for food and shelter taken care of before they will be able to focus on returning to their coursework. In the example of a sudden flood destroying a residence hall where students reside, the displaced students may first need to be given food and water, warm clothes, and shelter before they are prepared to meet with a counselor or study for an upcoming test.

Dimension 3: Human Physical And Psychological Needs

When discussing the most important aspects in any critical incident, the participants agreed that the safety and security of individuals is top priority at all times. Whenever possible, a college should take any possible measures to protect students, staff, and faculty from harm, including injury, death, or psychological trauma. Assessing the campus for adequate security, structural stability of buildings, lighting and emergency exits, and adequate emergency supplies can do this.

In the case of many critical incidents, responders will first need to ensure the physical safety and security of individuals impacted by the critical incident. However, the emotional trauma individuals may experience will also need to be considered. In the article, “In a Crisis, Focus on the People” author Paul M. Hewitt (year) writes, “The immediate situation is over within a day or even a couple of hours. It is the emotional fallout that can last for days, weeks, months and even years. Even the deepest wound will heal, but the scar remains” (p. 45).

As Participant D noted, the safety of the general community needs to be considered in addition to that of individuals involved with the campus. A college is an important part of the surrounding community, regardless of the “town-gown relationship” and responders need to understand the affect incidents occurring on campus can have in the general community.

Within this dimension, the following three best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus will be discussed within the context of the research findings and the related literature: (a) carefully assess and control threats before harm occurs, (b) prepare for a variety of injuries or death and keep appropriate supplies on hand, and (c) remember that each individual will process and respond to emotions, grief, and trauma differently.

- **Carefully assess and control threats before harm occurs.**

When a critical incident has occurred, there can be physical dangers created on campus such as mold, mildew, sewage water, biohazard waste, or rubble. These should be carefully assessed and controlled before secondary harm occurs to additional individuals in the area, causing more widespread injuries than have already

occurred. Participant A explained that the first priorities in a critical incident response are to, “Secure the scene so we don’t have anybody else injured, and then stop the threat.” This relates especially to critical incidents where property damage may cause risks to the well being in individuals impacted, or a crime has been committed on campus and a potentially dangerous situation still exists.

- **Prepare for a variety of injuries or death and keep appropriate supplies on hand.**

Despite the amount of preventative measures taken, there are times when a critical incident might still result in injury or death, and a campus needs to be prepared to deal with these. It is important to keep medical supplies on hand and be prepared for a variety of injuries. While a death on campus can cause psychological turmoil, there are also logistical aspects to dealing with fatalities that need to be considered.

Participant A noted that an ethical challenge he or she faces is what to do with the bodies of the deceased during and after a critical incident, and explained that the best strategy would be to turn to local hospital and medical personnel for assistance as soon as possible. Being as prepared as possible for injuries, even those of the worst sort, can make responding easier and less traumatic for everyone involved.

- **Remember that each individual will process and respond to emotions, grief, and trauma differently.**

Just as each student, staff, or faculty member is unique so is the support they might need during a critical incident. As Participant B noted, individuals who are disabled in any way may require different accommodations and assistance during a critical incident, particularly if it is one that requires evacuation or lockdown of

buildings. Some critical incidents might involve individuals who are intoxicated or under the influence of substances that might impair their understanding or judgment, and this will need to be taken into consideration during a response effort. Also, individuals from other cultures or who have difficulty communicating in the primary language used on campus will need different accommodations and services during a response effort.

Many people process emotions differently, and so will deal with grief or trauma caused by a critical incident in their own individual ways. This will need to be taken into consideration when trying to provide counseling or debriefing services to individuals, students or responders alike. Most importantly when responding to the psychological needs of impacted individuals is to be sure that services and assistance does not cause more harm than good.

Dealing with the loss of a community member or loved one and disruption to normal activities can be particularly devastating for a campus, its members, and surrounding community. More information on this is detailed in the Recovering and Returning dimension, below.

Dimension 4: Material And Structural Protection And Recovery

Campus property and buildings can play several roles in critical incident response. Certain types of critical incidents, such as earthquake, floods and hazardous material spills can cause extensive damage to campus property. Also, adjustments may need to be made to property at times to prepare for various critical incidents, such as ensuring that a building's structure will remain stable during an earthquake or flood, or that appropriate fire escapes, emergency doors, and stable shelters exist.

Within this dimension, the following two best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus will be discussed within the context of the research findings and the related literature: (a) consider response efforts such as evacuation or lockdown of buildings or quarantining individuals, and (b) establish temporary facilities and spaces.

- **Consider response efforts such as evacuation or lockdown of buildings or quarantining individuals.**

One way of controlling the area to minimize the risk of harm is to evacuate or lock down a building. On the campus studied, Participant A said, “We have the ability in a volatile situation to lock most of the buildings - automatic card lock so we can lock those down in just a matter of minutes, so we don’t have to worry about people entering buildings and going anywhere we don’t want them.” During an infectious disease outbreak situation, quarantining a population is another option for controlling the potential for harm. As Participant B explained, this requires advanced preparation in altering property, such as setting up an area with separate ventilation systems and bathrooms for the quarantined group.

- **Establish temporary facilities and spaces.**

When it is not possible to protect campus property during a critical incident, recovering or rebuilding can be extensive and go on for a drawn out period of time, as Participant B noted. It will be necessary for a CIRT to decide what to do during this time of recovery, and one option is establishing temporary spaces to take the place of residence hall living spaces, classrooms, or offices, as Participant B described doing during a critical incident that displaced a number of students. Participant B also

recommended establishing a blackboard or other area as a temporary information center in the case of a loss of technology. After the Borough of Manhattan Community College sustained extensive damage in the September 11, 2001 attacks on the nearby World Trade centers,

To replace the classroom space lost at the damaged Fiterman Hall, Anderson ordered six portable trailers... each capable of housing two separate classrooms – which he parked along the sides of campus with permission from the city. Next, officials carved up common space within the main campus building... The student lounge became four classrooms, and the former weight training and aerobics classrooms provided three more class spaces. Finally the reception area... yielded three classrooms. (Sturgeon, 2002, p. 18)

Dimension 5: Information Distribution

Each of the participants at some point stressed the importance of communication during a critical incident response. Communication during a response effort includes distributing information to individuals and groups as well as communicating between responders and administrators while responding to a critical incident.

Within this dimension, the following five best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus will be discussed within the context of the research findings and the related literature: (a) consider how information will be distributed, (b) plan for when and how much information you will provide to the public, (c) prepare for technology failure, (d) understand the ethical and legal aspects

of privacy issues, and (e) designate one individual to serve as a representative of the college.

- **Consider how information will be distributed.**

Considering and planning in advance for how information will be distributed among responders and to the public will save responders from a lot of confusion, and cause response efforts to occur much more smoothly. Participant A explained how the campus studied had a plan for using hand-held radios and ham radios for communication between responders that they had recently developed for use during a large-scale critical incident. . In a different critical incident, when Texas A&M University experienced a tragedy involving a bonfire collapsing and a group of students being deceased,

A “command center” was established in the office of the vice president for student affairs. We immediately established a toll-free number and placed a bank of telephones in the office in addition to the existing phones. All phones were staffed by volunteers who were kept updated continuously throughout the first twenty-four hours. Notification of family members began immediately as we started building three lists of students: deceased, injured, and missing or unaccounted for. (Lowery, 200, p. 22)

However information is distributed among responders during a critical incident response effort, it should be decided in advance by a CIRT and knowledge of the information distribution plan should be made available to every responder.

When distributing information to the public, the media should be used as a tool to circulate knowledge quickly. Participant A was the only participant to specifically

mention working with the media during a critical incident response, encouraging campuses to, “alert the media and keep them apprised of what’s going on so we don’t have parents that are from across the nation trying to call here, tying up the lines.” However, several of the participants spoke about communicating with the community in general during and after a critical incident response, and I believe that the media is one of the primary tools for doing so. Some of the participants seemed to agree that it is important to notify the community during the process of the response; however Participant E explained, “I think there needs to be a kind of closure statement that explains what happened and why it happened and the various universities’ publics deserve to have that kind of account.” During the Texas A&M University Bonfire collapse, “university relations staff set up regular media briefings on the site throughout the day. We used the media to get out the latest updates on deceased, injured, and missing students” (Lowery, 200, p. 23).

- **Plan for when and how much information you will provide to the public.**

Communicating to the public is an important part of any critical incident response, for several reasons. The support of the public is often needed during times of crisis on campus and during a large-scale critical incident the loved ones of students, staff, and faculty will need to know the current circumstances on campus. Participant E advised that when and how much information you distribute to the community should be discussed and decided by responders before releasing any information to the public or media.

You should notify the whole community with a truthful and fulsome account of what has happened when you have enough information and when the event

has gone or come to an end... I think that comes at the end of the process.

Now, sometimes you need to keep people informed along the way, but I think there needs to be a kind of closure statement that explains what happened and why it happened, and the various university's publics deserve to have that kind of account, and it necessarily comes at the end.

When asked to explain further his thoughts on communicating with the public during a response effort, Participant E further said,

Who rightly hears first about an injury? Who deserves to hear at all? Is it morally required that you inform the whole community about what's happened and at what point? It's not a no-brainer because you're balancing the interests of clear and true information to the whole community, versus some people's interest in privacy. So, those are ethical issues and there are dilemmas involved in them.

Responders should carefully consider what information to release before releasing it to the public. As Participant E noted, what information is shared should be carefully considered by responders before releasing it publicly, to ensure that confidential, misleading, or inappropriate information isn't spread. There are legal and ethical aspects to information distribution, particularly when there is injury, crime, or death involved. Dealing with privacy and confidentiality issues was mentioned by four of the participants as a challenge and an ethical issue. As Participant C said, rumors can spread quickly. It can be tempting to set the record straight in order to quell these rumors, but doing so could potentially violate a person's rights to privacy. Participant D recommended "educating and informing other people and why you're doing what

you're doing and what information you can give them or you can't." More information on working with the public is described in the dimension of Community relations.

- **Prepare for technology failure.**

One aspect of information distribution was mentioned by three of the participants; what to do when technology fails. Cell phones as well as landlines should not be relied on during a critical incident, particularly one that causes widespread damage to an area such as a flood or earthquake. Participant A suggested several alternative methods, including the use of hand-held radios or ham radios, when ham radio operators are available. These technologies may also work when communicating with local responders, as long as they have access to them. It is important to provide for enough radios, so that each individual has one that is primarily involved with the response effort. Participant B identified the need to plan for communication when technology has failed as a necessary part of a strategic response plan.

- **Understand the ethical and legal aspects of privacy issues.**

One of the challenges mentioned by several of the participants was maintaining the privacy of information, specifically in regards to working with parents of traditionally aged college students. Participant D said,

I think regarding privacy of information, regarding parental contact... you weigh the seriousness of the situation for this individual student versus their right to privacy, versus the parents' kind of nature and sometimes legal interest in knowing about that. And I think that's an ethical challenge.

Participant E had a similar view, stating, "Our protocol has been to notify parents even at the risk of... sometimes there's ambiguity about FERPA violations."

Responders should work closely with legal counsel to understand their options in regards to privacy and information distribution, as well as risks and consequences so that they will be prepared however they choose to act in the case of a critical incident.

- **Designate one individual to serve as a representative of the college.**

One of the best practices for distributing information during a critical incident response is to designate one individual to serve as a representative for the college during a critical incident response. On some campuses, this may be the same individual who is in the leadership position of the CIRT; however it does not need to be. The roles and responsibilities of the media representative are not related to those of the CIRT leader. This person is generally a representative from a media relations or public relations department, however does not have to be on a campus that does not have these departments and positions in place. Having one person designated for all communication with the public and media will help to avoid spreading conflicting information, something about which that Participant B spoke. This person will serve as the primary contact for the media, and will be the spokesperson for any information the college would like to officially release. Three of the participants discussed the importance of keeping the media alerted and “apprised of what’s going on so we don’t have parents that are from across the nation trying to call here, tying up the lines to where we can’t do our jobs here,” as Participant A said.

Speaking about an instance where a critical incident cause damage to a residential property and displaced students from their living areas outside of business hours, Participant E explained,

In that kind of crisis situation you want to speak with one voice and the voice

is typically the President's Office or his designated communications office, and in this instance with the chief communications officer not available... there was a more multi-vocal response from different folks and that was deemed unfortunate and confusing by some people.

In order to avoid this confusion and perhaps inappropriate information or comments being released to the public from members of the college, a campus should have a small number of appointed and specially trained representatives to speak to the media whenever information needs to be released.

When choosing an individual to represent the community as a spokesperson to the media and public, there are things to consider. Two of the participants recalled a critical incident response where the representative, a communications officer designated by the President of the college, was out of the area and unreachable. As Participant E explained, it is important for the college to speak with one voice and that the confusion surrounding who could speak with the media was "deemed unfortunate and confusing by some people." The person chosen to serve as representative should be ready to respond outside of business hours, and kept up-to-date on the situation and response efforts. There should always be a backup plan put into place in advance in case the chosen representative is unable to serve.

Dimension 6: Community Relations

A college campus does not exist in isolation, but is part of a greater community and at few times is this more important to remember than during a critical incident response. Partnerships and communication will need to be fostered with many individuals and groups, including parents and partners of students, local responders

such as fire, police, and hospital workers, donors, and the media. Bill Kibler, the associate vice president for student affairs at Texas A&M University when a bonfire collapse occurred, said, “Do not ever take for granted having good relationships with community agencies. Our positive working relationships with police, fire, and emergency response personnel, the local hospitals, and our local media paid off over and over again during this time. Never underestimate the value of openness in dealing with the media” (Lowery, 2000, p. 24)

Within this dimension, the following two best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus will be discussed within the context of the research findings and the related literature: (a) include local responders in discussions and planning, and (b) take special consideration when working with parents and partners of students, staff, and faculty.

- **Include local responders in discussions and planning.**

One of the first steps for a campus to become prepared to respond to a critical incident is,

To involve representatives from all relevant internal departments, local public safety and area public service agencies. Any department or organization that may be called upon to provide support should be involved. Some examples might include physical plant, university police, student services, local law enforcement agencies, American Red Cross, fire department and hospital emergency staff. If a department, agency, or organization would be needed for support during a crisis, a representative should be asked to help with plan development. A crisis is no time to decide how various disciplines can work

together. (Dorn, 2001, p. 24)

Local responders can be a tremendously useful resource for a campus during a critical incident, and often a campus will depend on them for assistance in a multitude of ways. Participant A in particular stressed several times the importance of involving local Police and Fire departments, and working with the local hospital in the case of injury or fatality.

The college's Critical Incident Response Team should include local responders in discussions before a critical incident occurs to determine how best to communicate with them during an incident as well as what the local responders will need from them, such as securing a scene for "evidentiary process" as Participant A mentioned. The campus studied also employed staff members who had served as local responders to work with campus safety.

Other relationships may need to be made during or prior to a critical incident, depending on the particular wants or needs of individuals impacted. Participant C explained that if a campus finds itself in need of a chaplain or religious official to assist with a critical incident response and don't keep one on staff, reaching out to the surrounding community to find someone to serve in this position is an option. Participant A explained that in the case of technology failure, partnering with local ham operators can be beneficial. Consider creating similar partnerships whenever a need arises that cannot be fulfilled by a campus member.

- **Take special consideration when working with parents and partners of students, staff, and faculty.**

Special consideration needs to be taken when communicating and working

with the parents and partners of students, staff, and faculty. Maintaining relationships with parents can be especially important for small campuses that pride themselves on a family feel. Participant E said,

A small campus like this sells itself... as a family environment and a kind of nurturing environment. That's part of what we sell and part of what we do. And part of that is a lot of face to face relationships... and we really do consider the parents part of the [campus's] community and not just for showing up on parents' day or athletic events but we like to keep in touch with them, like to keep them tied in and informed.

Responders should develop a philosophy for working with the parents and partners of campus members during a critical incident response and consider this philosophy during planning efforts.

Dimension 7: Legal Implications

The possible legal implications a campus might face after a critical incident response was not a focus of the discussion with any of the participants. The primary mentions of the legal aspects of response centered on privacy and confidentiality of information, which I explain more about in the Information Distribution section, above.

Participant B did speak briefly about the duty of a campus to outline rules and regulations, and the responsibility of students when they have failed to follow regulations, resulting in harm to other students, campus property, or student's possessions.

Within this dimension the best practice of working with legal counsel before, during, and after a critical incident response will be discussed within the context of the research findings and the related literature.

- **Work with legal counsel before, during, and after a critical incident response.**

A CIRT should consider working with legal counsel and advisors by share protocols and plans with them, including them in discussions, and bringing them into a response effort whenever possible. Responders should be aware of the college's risk management policy, if one exists, as well as the state's risk management laws, particularly if the college is a public institution.

Dimension 8: Diversity Issues

While diversity has become a priority on many college campuses, including the one studied, this was not a topic mentioned frequently or in any depth by the participants interviewed. Despite the lack of discussion of diversity issues such as working with students from other cultures, working with the mentally as well as physically disabled, and language barriers during the interviews with participants, I do believe it is important for a college's Critical Incident Response Team to consider the diverse communities on campus and how they might need to be considered during a critical incident response.

The British Columbia Department of Education (1998) created "Responding to Critical Incidents: A Resource Guide for Schools" in which they advise,

Given the diversity that exists in school and the community, staff members will need to give consideration to developing plans whose strategies are flexible to

meet this diversity. These strategies will need to be appropriate for individuals a groups who may respond different than staff would expect from their own cultural perspective. There are some important ideas to consider when developing and implementing a critical incidents response plan in a school with cultural diversity: Individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds may respond differently to stress situations, services employed to respond to a critical incident may need to go outside the school or district to community support staff who possess additional language skills, and beliefs around concepts of religions, death, and the grieving process differ amongst cultures. (p. 13)

Within this dimension, the following three best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus will be discussed within the context of the research findings and the related literature: (a) prepare for disability issues during critical incident response efforts, (b) consider students from other countries, cultures, and languages, and (c) consider the variety of religious perspectives.

- **Prepare for disability issues during critical incident response efforts.**

Participant B did note the importance of being prepared to work with disabled people during critical incidents. This is especially true when a response effort requires evacuation or lockdown, where individuals with disabilities may face added difficulties. When restoring and returning campus buildings, the needs of disabled individuals should always be considered, including issues of accessibility for the physically disabled and medical concerns for the mentally disabled. For instance, there may be disabled individuals on campus who can't use the stairs or fire escapes during

a fire in a campus building. Designating areas for disabled individuals to go to during a fire in order to meet rescuers as well as providing appropriate signs and directions, including those for people with a visual impairment, will be necessary. Individuals with a mental disability may require access to medication and health-care facilities or additional support services during a critical incident response.

- **Consider students from other countries, cultures, and languages.**

Participant B also spoke about the experiences he or she has had working with students from foreign countries. “We have a group of [students from a foreign country on campus] and generally their English skills are quite good but sometimes, especially in an emergency, if they’re not being understood well or understanding, it can be very scary. And so, we want to be especially attuned to their needs.” Language barriers can become an issue particularly during information distribution. Whenever possible, provide translation services for all students who may have difficulties with the English language. This should be considered and planned for before a critical incident occurs.

- **Consider the variety of religious perspectives.**

The various religious perspectives on a campus should be considered particularly when responding to psychological trauma or memorializing and honoring, where spiritual or religious needs may arise. Participant C had a unique perspective coming from his or her work with the religious or spiritual aspect of critical incident response. Participant C explained that when providing support for individuals impacted by a critical incident it is important to, “try not to represent a particular theological perspective if that’s not the one that’s important to the people that I’m talking to.”

The needs of all students must be considered during a critical incident response effort, not just the needs of the majority or general student population. Responders should be aware of what student groups exist on campus and what specific needs they may have during a critical incident.

Dimension 9: Recovering And Returning

The primary goal of an institution of higher education is exactly that: education. It is the duty of college administrators to begin providing educational and other services as soon as they are able. This includes providing courses and educational facilities as well as residential and dining services when applicable, as well as any other events or services that students rely on to meet their educational or social needs.

Within this dimension, the following three best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus will be discussed within the context of the research findings and the related literature: (a) return to normal functions as soon as possible, (b) consider any memorializing or honoring efforts that may be needed, and (c) review the events that transpired and understand the successes and downfalls that occurred.

- **Return to normal functions as soon as possible.**

In the article “How Much Emergency Preparedness?” author Lawrence Gibbs (2001) notes that recovery is “an often-overlooked facet of emergency planning” (p. 15). Returning to normal circumstances is a vital part of the healing process after suffering a critical incident. The disruption to activities, psychological traumas suffered, and the possible loss of community members can cause a strain on student’s

emotional health as well as their academic success. For Participant B, a priority for working with students who have been affected by a critical incident is “getting them so that that they can get back in class, start to function again.” After the deadly bonfire collapse at Texas A&M University, the associate vice president for student affairs explained, “We made the decision not to cancel classes the day of the collapse. We determined, and our counseling staff agreed, that it was important to keep as many things normal as possible. In addition, given the population of our campus, we needed something for people to do other than just watch the rescue efforts” (Lowery, 2000, p. 23).

The disruption to a sense of community can cause real turmoil, according to Participant B. “All these people knew each other, were connected and then all the sudden they’re spread out all over the place.” Participant B advises to, “Consider the importance of a student’s “sense of comfort, getting back into a routine.” In the article, “Responding to Traumatic Events on College Campuses: A Case Study and Assessment of Student Postdisaster Anxiety” (McCarthy et. al, 2003), researchers studied the experiences of students who were affected by a tornado that caused significant destruction on a college campus. The study found that, “The initial trauma was exacerbated by a prolonged disruption of their normal routines... Restoration efforts continued for 1 year, and students did not return to their original academic buildings until the buildings were repaired” (p. 92). The researchers went on to advise that, “Initiation of the rebuilding of some level of community will help to halt the loss cycle and will aid in the coping process. Creating a sense of community helps to rebuild social support. Conditions, or belongingness, can be a resource that directly

contributes to an individual's ability to rebuild from a disaster" (p. 95). As Participant D explained, "I think the priority is keeping the institution open, keeping the doors open. That we're going to try to keep having class because I think there's a real value in continuing normal business, so to speak."

- **Consider any memorializing and honoring efforts that may be needed.**

After Mark's death, the university offered us multiple opportunities for celebrating his life. These activities/traditions served as a springboard to help our family and the community as a whole begin to deal constructively with the tragedy. The activities served as both public expression of shared grief and opportunities to begin moving from grieving toward healing. The activities were offered in a compassionate manner, and they were genuine, substantive, robust expressions of sympathy, not insincere gestures... We believe that those gatherings were crucial in setting the tone and pointing everyone affected by the deal in the right direction, from tragedy to triumph. (Harper et. al., 2006, p. 50)

These are the words of the parents of a Texas A&M student who died in 1999, published in the book "Crisis Management: Responding from the Heart" (Harper et. al., 2006).

In order for a campus community to recover from a critical incident and return to its normal functioning state, after an event that tragically involves student death or illness it is helpful to memorialize and honor victims as well as survivors. When speaking about memorializing and honoring after a critical incident, Participant C explained, "I think it's pretty important... there's a kind of a necessity to do something in this setting because this was that person's home, this is where that person's friends

were.”

How a campus community member is honored after a tragedy is carried out can vary greatly – it can span from the campus forwarding on notes of condolence to survivors of an individual who has passed away, to a large scale gathering for a formal memorial service. Participant C’s office has “a full time administrative assistant. She’s one who kind of gets details out to the campus... these are... deaths of relatives of people on campus, at which case it’s more a pastoral response, letting other people know, sending flowers.” Identifying a specific individual on campus to serve in this role can make it much easier for the individuals impacted by a critical incident as well as responders to know whom to contact with questions and instructions.

“Responding to Critical Incidents: A Resource Guide for Schools” created by The British Columbia Department of Education (1998), advises that “family wishes should guide planning of a remembrance activity after a critical incident which involved a student or staff death.” This should always be taken into consideration.

Planning a way of honoring a member of a campus community should not be reserved only for cases that involved death or disappearance. Participant B explains, “We’ve had some serious brain injuries that after the students were injured [where] brain injury and the recovery process went on for months and so [community members] were deeply, deeply affected for all of that time.” There are many circumstances that might require a campus to honor or memorialize a member of its community, and this is something that campus administrators should consider whenever a campus community is deeply impacted by a trauma.

It’s important to understand the individuals impacted by a critical incident

when planning a service memorializing or honoring a person or group. If the individuals impacted are traditional aged undergraduate students, Participant C acknowledges, “If I’m talking to 18 to 22 year olds, particularly 18 year olds, people are at such different places in terms of their own maturity that they may not be ready to or even know how to begin processing grieving or pain. And so, in kind of a developmental way there are issues.” Consider the variety of cultures, religions, and demographics on a college campus when deciding how to memorialize or honor after a critical incident.

- **Review the events that transpired and understand the successes and downfalls that occurred.**

Before returning to normal functioning after a critical incident, it is often necessary to review the events that transpired and understand the successes and downfalls the campus experienced during the critical incident response. Whether this should take place immediately after a critical incident response has finished or after a time has passed is something that should be decided by the Critical Incident Response Team based on the specifics of the incident experienced.

A CIRT should convene and reflect on the response efforts sooner, rather than later. Reflecting on the critical incident response as soon as possible can mean that the events are still fresh in participants’ minds and it is easier to recall specifics and perceptions. Participant A explains that the campus studied has a policy to meet after a critical incident response and, “critique the incident and see if there are some things that we could have done differently as quickly as we could. Make sure that we covered all the bases and make sure that we’d do it right the next time. Hopefully,

there wouldn't be another time, but you never know." Participant B also explained, "Some of it is processing what did we do and well how did it work and what do we need to learn from this."

Other Recommendations

Three best practices were developed during this research, despite the fact that they did not emerge directly from the literature or interview data. I have included these best practices because I believe they are important aspects of critical incident response, and should be considered by responders.

The following three best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus did not fall into the dimensions described above, yet merit attention and discussion: (a) consider the impact on donor relations, (b) consider the possibility of bringing in a critical incident response professional, and (c) everyone can benefit from learning about critical incident response.

- **Consider the impact on donor relations.**

The relationship with donors was not referenced in the related literature or mentioned by any of the participants, although I, as a researcher, had anticipated that it would be. I think this is important to note, because some small colleges, particularly private ones, depend on support from donors. A critical incident that affects the reputation of a college, such as a crime on campus, may cause a college to lose some support from donors. Responders should consider this possibility before a critical incident occurs, and consider ways to work with donors to minimize any possible damage to partnerships or reputations.

- **Consider the possibility of bringing in a critical incident response professional.**

Although it was not referenced in the related literature or during any of the interviews, there may be the option for campus responders to turn to outside professionals who deal with critical incident or crisis response. These professionals may or may not be within the industry of higher education, but may be able to assess the campus for physical and public relations preparation and offer valuable advice and services. Professionals dealing with crisis management may be located within a community, such as through a local police, fire, or public safety department.

- **Everyone can benefit from learning about critical incident response.**

While there may be a core group of responders on a campus, whether or not they have convened as a CIRT, it is important to note that all staff and faculty can benefit from learning about critical incident response, training for aspects of response efforts, and being made aware of existing response plans and teams. While not every campus member can serve on a CIRT or hold a leadership position during a response effort, it takes many people to respond during a large-scale critical incident. As many people as possible should be included in learning how to administer first-aid, communicate during technology failure, and learning what to do during common types of critical incidents in order to protect themselves and others.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Areas of Further Research

Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to help support small college campuses in minimizing the harm caused by critical incidents. This has been done by developing a set of nine dimensions of critical incident response on a small college campus, and a series of best practices for response within each dimension. These nine dimensions were developed based on an original set of thirteen dimensions of critical incident response informed by the review of related literature. I then tested the original thirteen dimensions by analyzing the data to see where it fit into the dimensions, and then revised the dimensions based on the data analysis. The best practices for critical incident response on a small college campus were informed by the interview data and literature related to the topic. The final nine dimensions of a critical incident response as well as the best practices described within each are detailed in Chapter 5. It is important for higher education administrators responding to critical incidents to take an objective look at their plans and preparations to determine if they will truly be effective and adequate during a critical incident, and this research study supports administrators in these efforts.

These dimensions and best practices should not be viewed as a complete and all-encompassing guide to every aspect of critical incident response, but rather as a tool for responders to discuss and prepare their campus for future critical incident response efforts. Just as each critical incident is unique and requires its own individual response efforts, each campus is unique and requires different response planning efforts.

Outside of the set of dimensions and best practices, I discovered three main ideas from the research analysis. First, the responder's perceptions and beliefs did not necessarily match up with the literature available on the topic of critical incident response. Some aspects of critical incident response that were addressed regularly in the literature, such as Diversity issues and Memorializing and honoring, were hardly mentioned by the participants. Conversely, the dimension of Material and structural protection and recovery was mentioned occasionally in the research, but was stressed much more often by the participants, who also brought up aspects of the dimension that I did not find anywhere in the literature. These discrepancies between the research data and the related literature show that the current literature on the topic of critical incident response does not meet up with the needs of responders and the way they are prioritizing response efforts. It also shows that the practical response measures taken by higher education administrators may not be taking into consideration aspects of response that are considered important by experts, such as considering diversity issues during a response.

Second, almost all of the participants identified that during a critical incident response they depended most on common sense, intuition, and communication and relationships with other responders. This is different than the majority of literature on the subject, which focuses on the importance of critical incident response teams, strategic response plans, and trainings. This was an interesting finding because it showed that the literature related to the topic of critical incident response did not acknowledge the tools most used by responders in assessing and prioritizing response efforts. More research needs to be done on this topic in order to further understand the

needs of responders and the effectiveness of strategic response plans during response efforts.

Third, it was clear to me after each of the interviews that the participants cared very much about being prepared for critical incident response on their campus. Priority was put on responding with sensitivity and thoughtfulness as well as supporting other responders and individuals who have been impacted during a critical incident.

Recommended Areas of Further Research

There are several areas of further research that could be conducted in relation to the topic of critical incident response on a small college campus. Several of the participants at some point mentioned differences they saw between critical incident responses on campuses with large or small student populations. While this did not fit into any of the research questions I identified, I think it is an important aspect to explore in future research in order to provide more clear and detailed information and support to all higher education administrators. If research shows that smaller college campuses have needs or experiences that differ greatly from larger college campuses than response guides can be created that are more tailored to the needs of each campus type. Also, because this research consisted of a case study of only one campus, I was not able to explore how critical incident response might be different at private versus public institutions or religiously affiliated versus non-religiously affiliated small college campuses.

I believe that each of the dimensions themselves could become topics for further research. For example, future studies could be centered around “Memorializing and honoring victims or survivors on a small college campus” or “Leadership in

response on a small college campus.” Each of these topics could provide more detailed and in-depth information on these aspects of critical incident response than can be provided in a research study such as this one that focuses on a more broad scope of critical incident response in a higher education setting. Also, conducting research on this topic on a wider number of campuses could make the data more generalizable, and explore how the results might be different from a wider range of voices, experiences, and perspectives. Further research needs to be conducted that tests the set of dimensions I have developed in the setting of higher education, and small college campuses in particular as well as to examine the appropriateness and usefulness of the best practices I have introduced in Chapter 5.

The best practices “Consider the impact on donor relations” and “Consider the possibility of bringing in a critical incident response professional” described in the Other Recommendations section of Chapter 5 did not emerge directly from the literature or interview data, but were included because I believe they are important aspects of critical incident response and merit attention and discussion. Further areas of research could be centered on the impact of a critical incident on donor relations, as well as the affect of bringing in a critical incident response professional to assist in campus preparations for critical incidents.

The topic of critical incident response on college campuses is one that deserves further study in order to provide colleges with the body of knowledge needed to respond to critical incidents as best as possible. A college does not exist in isolation, and a critical incident that occurs on a college campus can cause a ripple effect throughout the surrounding community and beyond. There are many people impacted

when a critical incident occurs on a college campus, including students, staff, faculty and their parents, partners, and other loved ones. The purpose of this research is to support small college campuses in preparing for and responding to critical incidents to the best of their abilities, in order to minimize harm to the campus and community in general.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Proposal Protocol

1. Brief Description:

This research project, titled *Critical Incident Response on College Campuses* is designed to fulfill the requirements of thesis for the completion of a Master of Science degree in the College Student Services Administration major through the Oregon State University College of Education. This research study will strive to answer the question, “What are effective practices for critical incident response on a college campus with a small population?”

A critical incident is defined by Minnesota West Community & Technical College (2003) as “an incident that places [a college campus’s] students, faculty, staff and facilities at risk.” (p. 9) A small campus population is defined, for the purposes of this study, by myself as having fewer than 6,000 students enrolled full-time for credit. I have chosen to evaluate campus size based on full-time, for-credit students because this is a statistic that is generally available from most colleges.

Research will take the form of a qualitative case study of a campus that has experienced different types of critical incidents in the past. The study will consist of interviews with staff and faculty in various departments as well as collecting historical data about the critical incidents. The end product of this research will take the form of a guide suggesting the best practices and practical suggestions behind critical incident response on a campus with a small student population. The data from this study will also be used in professional conference proposals/presentations and possible publication in professional journals.

2. Background and Significance:

The intent of this research is to assist college campuses with a small student population in becoming better informed about critical incident response, through providing them with a guide of best practices and practical suggestions. I have chosen this topic based on a need for academic research on the topic of critical incident response specifically addressing smaller campuses, whose needs, resources, and community infrastructure in a time of crisis may be different than those of larger campuses.

3. Methods and Procedures:

Following IRB approval, I will begin by identifying a campus to study, which will be done by researching past critical incidents that have occurred within the past 5-10 years on campuses with a small student population within the Pacific Northwest Region. I will use the Internet as well as libraries to research these past incidents, as well as speak directly with individuals who are familiar with this type of campus to discover if they are aware of any critical incidents that have taken place.

After determining which campus I will study, I will recruit 6 to 10 participants from the administration and faculty of that campus. This recruiting will be done verbally through phone calls and emails. Attached are copies of all recruitment materials.

I will pilot the interview questions with 5 – 10 administrators and faculty members at Oregon State University who have been involved in critical incident response at Oregon State University. These participants will be identified through their involvement with Oregon State University's Critical Incident Response Team.

Information collected from the piloting of these questions will not be used for any research purpose, published, or otherwise made public. Attached is a copy of these interview questions. After piloting the questions, I will revise the questions based on the effectiveness of the questions during the pilots in order to ensure clarity, consistency, and depth of information collection.

The interview questions will then be submitted to the participants in a written form several days before interviews are conducted. I will then perform in-person interviews with the participants, which I will audio record. These interviews will be semi-structured, comprised of open and closed-ended questions, generated by myself, as well as general discussion about the critical incident and campus response. I will conduct the interviews in a secure and confidential location, and the audio data will be transcribed by a professional, confidential transcription service. The estimated time commitment for a participant's involvement will total 3 to 6 hours, which will include 1-3 hours for the interview as well as up to 3 hours spent in correspondence and follow-up.

I will also collect historical data through in-depth research through the internet, libraries, and public records to gain an understanding of the critical incidents and collect facts, timelines of the events, materials and information published by the media, as well as any statements from campus staff, faculty, or students that were made at the time.

4. Risks/Benefit Assessment:

- **Risks** – There are minimal risks to the participants in this study. The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures

described in this study include: Possible discomfort, or emotional distress when recalling situations during a critical incident response that the participant was involved in, if they caused psychological or emotional trauma. Participants will be able to refuse to answer any questions, for any reason. The interview questions are designed to gain information on the response of the campus to a critical incident that took place, not to gain personal information or evaluate the type or depth of personal trauma a participant may have experienced while responding to a critical incident.

- **Benefits** – There may be no direct personal benefit for participating in this study. However, the researchers anticipate that data from this research project will be useful to personnel of similar campuses when they respond to future critical incidents, and will contribute to the body of knowledge on critical incident response.
- **Conclusion** – There are minimal risks for participants involved in this study. However there are expected benefits to personnel of other college campuses in preparing for critical incident response, as well as potentially important contributions in general knowledge on critical incident response.

5. Participant Population:

During the piloting of the interview questions at Oregon State University, 5 – 10 participants will be involved. During the actual data collection for the research study, 6 – 10 participants will be involved.

The criteria being used to select a campus to study includes the campus having a small student population, being within the Pacific Northwest region, and having had experienced different types of critical incidents within the past 10 years.

The participants will all be administrators and faculty members on a college campus, and the participant population is not restricted to any gender, ethnic, age range, or any other demographic group.

Participants will be selected based on their professional involvement in responding to critical incidents at the college campus being studied.

6. Subject Identification and Recruitment:

When identifying subjects, I will not take into account gender, ethnicity, or any other characteristics of the participants, other than their title and type of campus responsibilities related to critical incident response. After identifying individuals at the campus being studied, I will recruit these individuals to participate in the study through making initial phone and email contact. This initial phone and email contact will consist of explaining the project being conducted as well as what activities the participant's involvement would consist of, as well as their rights to decline involvement at any time. All recruitment materials are attached to this document.

7. Compensation:

Participants will receive no compensation for participating in this research.

8. Informed Consent Process:

The researchers will send a cover letter to each participant explaining the proposed project and the informed consent process along with the consent form. Each

participant will be asked to sign a copy of the consent form at the interview. A copy of the consent document will be returned to each participant for his or her records.

9. Anonymity or Confidentiality:

The interviews will be conducted in a secure, confidential, and private setting that will be chosen in conjunction with the participant. The audio recordings of the interviews will not include the participants' names, the campus location, or any other identifying information. Each participant will be referred to by a number on both the audio recordings and in all presentations and publications. The campus studied will not be referred to by name and no identifying information will be provided in the research. The audio data will be transcribed by a professional, confidential transcription service and the audiotapes will be destroyed after successful completion of the thesis.

Attachments:

- a. Informed Consent Information
- b. Recruitment Materials
- c. Interview Questions

Bibliography:

Critical Incident Response Plan [Electronic version]. (2003, October). Minnesota West Community & Technical College. Retrieved May 17, 2006, from <http://www.mnwest.edu/fileadmin/images/studenterv/critical2003.pdf>

Appendix B: Informed Consent Document

(The informed consent document was submitted to Participants on Oregon

State University Department of Adult Higher Education letterhead.)

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: *Critical Incident Response on College Campuses*
Principal Investigator: Dr. Jessica White, College Student Services Administration
Co-Investigator(s): Dani Marlette, The SMILE Program

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are being invited to take part in a research study designed to investigate effective practices for critical incident response on a college campus with a small student population. Specifically, this research will consist of a case study of a Pacific Northwest college campus with a small student population that has experienced a critical incident within the past 5-10 years. Data will be collected through interviews with individual administration and faculty members who were involved with critical incident response at this campus. The end product of this research study will take the form of a guide of best practices and practical suggestions for critical incident response on small college campuses. The results of this research study will be used towards the completion of a Master of Science thesis, as well as for professional conference proposals/presentations, and may be submitted for publication in professional journals. We are studying this because there is a perceived need for additional academic research on the topic of critical incident response specifically addressing smaller campuses. The needs, resources, and community infrastructure on such campuses in a time of crisis may be different from those of larger campuses.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?

This consent form gives you the information you will need to help you decide whether you would like to participate in this study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, please indicate whether you wish to participate in this study.

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You are being invited to take part in this study because you may have been professionally involved with critical incident response at the campus being studied.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

The interview questions will be submitted to you in a written form several days before the interview is conducted. One of the researchers will then conduct an in-person interview with you, which we will audio record, with your consent. Audio recording is not optional, but is required as part of the research to accurately capture your responses. These interviews will be semi-structured, comprised of open and closed-ended questions, generated by us, as well as general discussion about the critical incidents and campus response. One of the researchers will conduct the interviews in a secure and confidential location, which will be chosen in conjunction with you.

If you agree to take part in this study, the duration of your total involvement is expected to be 3 to 6 hours. This includes the initial interview, which will last 1 – 3 hours, as well as up to 3 hours spent in correspondence and, with your consent, a brief follow-up interview.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include: Possible discomfort, or emotional distress when recalling situations during a critical incident response in which you were involved, if the incident caused psychological or emotional trauma. The questions you will be asked during the interview are designed to gain information on the response of the campus to a critical incident that took place, not to gain personal information or address any trauma you may have experienced while responding to a critical incident.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

There may be no direct benefit for you from participating in this study. However, we hope that in the future, other people might benefit from this study because the data from this research project will be useful to personnel of similar campuses when they respond to future critical incidents, and will contribute to the body of knowledge on critical incident response.

WILL YOU BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will not be paid for participating in this research study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION YOU GIVE?

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. To help protect your confidentiality, we will only use identification code numbers to refer to you on any audio recordings or documents, and in presentations and publications. Any audio recordings created will be destroyed after the completion of this

research study. No identifying information about yourself or the campus being studied will be made public at any time. Information will only be shared with members of the research team, the OSU Institutional Review Board, and the transcribers of the audiotapes. This informed consent document and all audiotapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the study and then destroyed upon its completion.

DO YOU HAVE A CHOICE TO BE IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you are freely choosing to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. During the interview, you will be free to skip any questions that you would prefer not to answer. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may retain your responses, and this information may be included in study reports.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact:

[Personal contact information was removed from this document for privacy reasons.]

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-4933 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What sort of involvement do you have with critical incident response at your campus?
2. What is your professional role in responding to critical incidents?
3. What sort of involvement does your department have with critical incident response at your campus?
4. How long have you been involved with critical incident response at your campus?
5. What sort of critical incidents have you responded to within the past 5-10 years?
6. Specifically at a smaller campus, what are some of the most effective practices for critical incident response?
7. Specifically at a smaller campus, what are some of the more ineffective practices for critical incident response?
8. When responding to these critical incidents, what are some of the main challenges you, as an administrator, faced?
9. What are some of the successes your campus, and yourself as an administrator, experienced?
10. How do you think issues of communication within your campus influenced the critical incident responses?
11. What sort of ethical challenges or issues have you dealt with, when responding to a critical incident?
12. During these responses, what dimensions of the critical incident response were addressed first? How would you change this now?
13. What dimensions of the critical incident response were addressed later on? In retrospect, how would you change this approach?
14. How did you or your campus prioritize what dimensions of the critical incident response to respond to, and when?
15. Do you feel that there were consequences, either negative or positive, based on how the dimensions of the critical incident response were prioritized?

16. If the campus had a strategic plan in place during the responses, how useful was it?
17. How confident do you feel about your campus's ability and preparation to respond to a critical incident in the future?
18. What would improve your campus's ability to respond to a critical incident in the future?

Appendix D: Revised Nine Dimensions
And The Best Practices Within Each

Revised Nine Dimensions And The Best Practices Within Each

Dimension 1: Response Plans, Teams, & Preparation	Dimension 2: Assessing & Prioritizing	Dimension 3: Human Physical & Psych. Needs	Dimension 4: Material & Structural Prot. & Recovery	Dimension 5: Information Distribution	Dimension 6: Community Relations	Dimension 7: Legal Implications	Dimension 8: Diversity Issues	Dimension 9: Recovering & Returning	Other Recommend ations
<p>Form a Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT).</p> <p>Develop clear and in-depth strategic response plans.</p> <p>Acquire adequate funds, staff, and equipment.</p> <p>Provide adequate training for campus responders.</p> <p>Consider ways to foster successful relationships among responders.</p> <p>Clearly define, document, and communicate the roles and responsibilities of responders.</p> <p>Have a diverse combination of responders involved.</p> <p>Meet regularly to discuss and communicate.</p> <p>Remain flexible in plans, protocols, and meeting times during times of response.</p> <p>Emphasize leadership in response efforts.</p>	<p>Remember that the safety and security of individuals is the top priority.</p> <p>Acknowledge the role of common sense and intuition in response efforts.</p> <p>Consider Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs.</p>	<p>Carefully assess and control threats before harm occurs.</p> <p>Prepare for a variety of injuries or death and keep appropriate supplies on hand.</p> <p>Remember that each individual will process and respond to emotions, grief, and trauma differently.</p>	<p>Consider response efforts such as evacuation or lockdown of buildings or quarantining individuals.</p> <p>Establish temporary facilities and spaces.</p>	<p>Consider how information will be distributed.</p> <p>Plan for when and how much information you will provide to the public.</p> <p>Prepare for technology failure.</p> <p>Understand the ethical and legal aspects of privacy issues.</p> <p>Designate one individual to serve as a representative of the college.</p>	<p>Include local responders in discussions and planning.</p> <p>Take special consideration when working with parents and partners of students, staff, and faculty.</p>	<p>Work with legal advisors before, during, and after a critical incident response.</p>	<p>Prepare for disability issues during critical incident response efforts.</p> <p>Consider students from other countries, cultures, and languages.</p> <p>Consider the variety of religious perspectives.</p>	<p>Return to normal functions as soon as possible.</p> <p>Consider any memorizing or honoring efforts that may be needed.</p> <p>Review the events that transpired and understand the successes and downfalls that occurred.</p>	<p>Consider the impact on donor relations.</p> <p>Consider the possibility of bringing in a critical incident response professional.</p> <p>Everyone can benefit from learning about critical incident response.</p>

Appendix E: Comparison Chart of Original (13) Dimensions
And Revised (9) Dimensions

Comparison Chart Of Original (13) Dimensions And Revised (9) Dimensions

Original (13) Dimensions	Revised (9) Dimensions
Dimension 7: Leadership in Response	Dimension 1: Response Plans, Teams, and Preparation
Dimension 8: Inter-institutional Communication & Relationships	
Dimension 12: Response Plans and Teams	
Dimension 1: Assessing and Prioritizing	Dimension 2: Assessing and Prioritizing
Dimension 2: Human Physical and Medical Needs	Dimension 3: Human Physical and Psychological Needs
Dimension 3: Human Emotional and Psychological Needs	
Dimension 5: Material/Structural Protection and Recovery	Dimension 4: Material and Structural Protection and Recovery
Dimension 9: Information Distribution	Dimension 5: Information Distribution
Dimension 6: Community, media, and government relations	Dimension 6: Community Relations
Dimension 4: Legal Implications	Dimension 7: Legal Implications
Dimension 13: Cultural Diversity Issues	Dimension 8: Diversity Issues
Dimension 10: Memorializing and Honoring	Dimension 9: Recovering and Returning
Dimension 11: Recovering and Returning	
Other Recommendations	Other Recommendations