The University of Kansas
Information Services Policy

Policy Name:  Crisis Communications Response Policy

Policy Purpose: To establish the definition of a crisis within Information Services and to outline the steps to take to respond to the crisis in an appropriate and timely manner.

Scope: All Information Services staff who discover problems or issue that need to be evaluated according to the Information Services Crisis Definition.

General Policy Provisions
The event of any of the following “crisis” scenarios would signal the activation of The Crisis Communications Plan for KU Information Services:

- a suspected breach of confidential data, whether the breach is internal or external to the University
- a serious personnel-related issue that will likely become public knowledge
- theft or destruction of University property that is managed by Information Services
- any situation in which it is necessary to protect evidence so that we may cooperate with law enforcement
- any event that may bring intense and/or negative media attention to Information Services

Procedures of Information Services Staff
The following steps will be utilized to respond to crisis situations.

1. Assess the crisis situation - Actions for the Information Services employee:
   - Evaluate the crisis: Does this situation meet any of our crisis criteria? If so, call the Vice Provost Office (during off-hours, call the Coordinator of IT Policy and Planning).

2. Identify the crisis communications team: Who needs to be in the room to assist with the response to this incident? Actions for the Vice Provost’s office:
   - Core team:
     o Vice Provost for Information Services (executive leader)
     o External Relations Officer
     o Coordinator of IT Policy and Planning
     o Associate Vice Provost, Assistant Vice Provost or Dean of Libraries, as appropriate.
   - Determine whether and when any of the following should be included in the response team:
     o University Relations – probably always a member of the team, but perhaps not at the initial information-gathering stages
     o General Counsel – when legal issues may be a factor
     o Staff from Information Services whose skills or position make them relevant to the response (ex. Security Officer, experts on a project that is related to the crisis); these people may be involved in the planning for the response, or may only be called to provide information; will be determined on a case-by-case basis
     o Representative from non-IT units that are affected by the crisis
Choose a Team Coordinator

3. Debrief the crisis communications team on the relevant issues. Actions for the crisis team coordinator:
   - Document an accurate description of the crisis. If necessary (if the issue is complex and some members of the team may not grasp the related technology issues), write a confidential brief to be sure everyone receives the same comprehensive version of the story before the team begins its response. Ensure the brief is marked “draft.”
   - Gather the team to begin discussions. Establish clear communications protocols for the incident, and be sure all team members are aware of them.

4. Identify and know our audiences - Actions for the crisis team and university relations:
   - The crisis response team quickly identifies the list of audiences and the key messages to convey.
   - Audiences may include: IT staff (central and local), key KU administrators, all staff and faculty, students, specific media, IT community, IT vendor community.

5. Implement guidelines for key messages – Actions for spokespeople and media coordinators.
   - All external crisis communications need to consistently (and honestly) communicate the following underlying messages.
     - We have investigated and know the facts.
     - We acted quickly.
     - We are doing what we can to address the problem, we accept responsibility for making it better and sincerely regret any difficulties this may have caused you.
     - We are respectful of other people and we respect and value individual privacy, freedom of expression, academic inquiry, etc.
     - We are cooperating with law enforcement, if relevant.
     - We are providing information and/or assistance to those who were affected.
     - We are a responsible, competent organization.
   - Determine if different audiences require different versions of the message.

6. Identify the appropriate spokespersons for the crisis - Actions for crisis team coordinator and university relations.
   - Determine who should speak, and to which audiences.
   - Clarify who is authorized to give interviews and ensure that everyone who is affected by the crisis knows who these people are, as well as to whom they should direct calls.
   - Provide talking points to the spokespeople, and refresh them as the situation changes.

7. Decide on communications methods - Actions for crisis team coordinator and university relations.
   - Determine: What is the best way to communicate the key messages? A news release, mass email, mass voice mail, press conference, an employee meeting are possibilities.
   - Communicate with internal audiences first, or at least concurrently when sending an external message.
   - Assume that a broad internal audience will not keep the story inside the University.
   - Prepare the spokespeople, including UR spokespeople who will be commenting on technology issues. Clarify desirable language as well as language to avoid.
   - Identify individuals to field media calls.
- Notify University Relations when we arrange an interview or respond to a request, so they can track media coverage.

8. **Ensure proper follow-through - Actions for crisis team coordinator:**
   - Stay in touch with the community after a crisis, especially with those directly affected.
   - Keep the media informed of any updates in the situation, or let them know the crisis has ended.
   - Review internal policies to try to avoid a repeat of the crisis situation.
   - Collect all media clips.
   - A few weeks after the crisis has passed, hold a formal debriefing to evaluate the response. Determine what was successful and what can be improved.

**Responsible Office:** Office of the Vice Provost for Information Services

**Approval:** Vice Provost for Information Services

**Approved:** March 1, 2003, revised February 23, 2004

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