

Off-campus disasters, On-campus responses



Commission for Counseling
and Psychological Services
A Division of the American College Personnel Association

This fall's series of hurricanes have again challenged the ways in which colleges and universities support their students during large-scale disasters. We solicited counseling center folks to share some of their situation-specific and ongoing efforts to care for students facing devastating events. The following are some approaches described.

"We undertook several steps to provide assistance to both our native students who hailed from the affected states or students who transferred in as part of impacted institution's plans to care for their students and faculty. These include:

- The Dean of Students office provided the equivalent of a transfer orientation for the visiting students which included presentations by campus resources. The Counseling Center was included in this program and provided time to speak about the short and long term challenges of the transition.
- The Department of Housing and Residence Education got the addresses to all the native and visiting students and sent letters outlining services on the campus
- The Counseling Center offered a Support Group for the native and visiting students affected by the hurricanes.
- Information on the Counseling Center's Support Group and general counseling services for the visiting students was provided academic advisors
- The Counseling Center ran a banner on its web site with links to supportive information
- Counseling Center faculty provided consultation to relocated faculty from institutions and provided community referrals for ongoing support
- Updated information on provision of services was shared by the Counseling Center and Student Mental Health Services to coordinate overall care
- The Counseling Center's liaison with the Department of Housing and Residence Life and Education provided information to DHRE staff on the potential short and long term stress points and reactions of affected students, e.g., adjustment to academic culture, upcoming holidays, impeded communication with family, displacement from friends, altered experiences such as graduation, internships, etc.
- The university's Trauma Response Team discussed ways to address quality of life issues for the visiting students and ways to facilitate access of these students to community and campus resources."

"We put a temporary informational section related to the gulf coast hurricanes on our counseling center website (and a link to our site on the main university website), including information on coping with trauma and an advertisement for a student support group for those affected by the hurricanes."

"Counseling Center leaders are included in our Incident Control System - style campus crisis management program, along with other campus leaders, police, etc."

"At our Counseling Center we actually have developed a Critical Incident Response Team comprising of clinical and non-clinical staff. Our Center actually has its own disaster plan as part of our crisis protocols. The plan covers preparedness, response, and continuity of operations. Our plan is actually often talked about because its one of the few that exist for a department on the campus. Several of our staff also have gone through the Red Cross National Disaster Mental Health Training and all of our incoming pre-doctoral interns go through an intense and on-going crisis and disaster mental health training component during their year here including simulations and seminars."

"The UCD campus is the temporary home of some Katrina displaced students, somewhere around 30 if I recall

correctly. CAPS has invited all of them to a program on stress/transition issues, and we will offer a support group for those who are interested. We also invited each of them individually to use our counseling services."

"Related to disaster response in general, over the years we have had a couple of different trainings on disaster response. We have developed a comprehensive Crisis Resource Manual for our staff (everyone keeps a copy at home, on a CD and also in hard copy), to assist us in developing a plan to deal with a variety of potential disasters. This was developed after 9/11. Thankfully, we have not had to use it, but we feel a little better prepared to respond if needed."

"We did a special orientation for Katrina students where they received personal invitation. Mostly this consisted of presentation on student services (with counseling center being especially emphasized and the director talking about recovery from disasters) and an informal lunch where several counseling members could interact with students to help determine the need for a support group or other services."