

President's Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

Office of the President

February 25, 2008

Last fall I convened three task forces to examine the tragedy that took place at Virginia Tech. These task forces were organized around broad areas of concern: security, communication during and after an emergency, and strategies for dealing with disturbed students. Our Emergency Situations Student Support Committee, Information Technology Communications Task Force and the Security Infrastructure Task Force did an excellent job of examining Virginia Tech's internal reviews, as well as the State of Virginia's "Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech" external review. In this process they considered hundreds of pages of documents in the context of Ferris State University.

I want to update you on our efforts to learn from this tragedy, and the planning we've done to prepare for unforeseeable events. We have worked hard to synthesize these materials, coordinate our efforts, and prioritize the adoption of recommendations from the task force reports.

Three things have become immediately apparent. First, much good work has been done on emergency preparedness at our University. (http://www.ferris.edu/president/memos/EP_SafetyUpdate2008.pdf). Second, emergency management cannot rest solely on work already completed or this reexamination in the context of Virginia Tech; it will have to be an ongoing effort to be successful. Third, as individuals it is important we develop our understanding of potential threats, be prepared ourselves, and know how we can assist our neighbors.

The following recommendations are either underway already, or will be implemented in the immediate future.

Recommendations that involve planning –

- 1) Emergency Response Plans will be kept up-to-date and their distribution coordinated.
- 2) Emergency Planning and Response at locations outside Big Rapids will be reviewed, evaluated, and updated.
- 3) Post-event communications and business continuity plans will be developed.
- 4) A Students of Concern Committee has already been established by to improve communication, collaboration and cooperation among the various offices that typically coordinate care and deal with disturbed and/or disturbing students. A Threat Assessment Team (TAT) is also being formed to determine if a specific student is a threat to themselves or others.

Recommendations involving education, training, and practice -

- 1) A comprehensive plan of drills and emergency response training to include all buildings and to be available to all campus employees and students will be developed and implemented.
- 2) Programs will be developed to educate students, faculty, and staff on depression and suicide, high risk situations, and disturbed/disruptive students in and out of the classroom. Programs will also be developed on FERPA, HIPAA and ADA regarding the sharing of information on disturbed students.
- 3) Student workshops will be developed on conflict management, resilience and problem solving.

Recommendations involving technical capabilities -

- 1) A grant-funded "City Watch" communications system that provides the capability to communicate with University employees and students via landline, cell phone, email, or text message has been purchased, should be installed before the end of the academic year and operational before fall semester begins
- 2) Classroom communications will be enabled by the installation of telephones in each room and instant messaging software in all teaching station computers. Further study will determine if classroom telephones should be a standard device, use Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP), or be some other Internet-enabled device.
- 3) The current blue light emergency assistance phone system will be upgraded and expanded to reflect campus traffic patterns.
- 4) Card readers are currently in residence hall doors. This system will be expanded to include 18 residence hall "front door" entrances for 24/7 access.
- 5) Current campus and building security systems will be evaluated.
- 6) A multi-year plan will be developed for the installation, maintenance, and replacement of the campus network.
- 7) The installation of additional electronic message boards in strategic, high-traffic locations will be studied.

These actions build upon emergency planning efforts already underway at the University. Beyond these fourteen action items, there are numerous other recommendations. To continue and coordinate the evaluation of our emergency preparedness and implementation of task force recommendations, I will create and chair a coordinating committee to work with the Emergency Management Team.

I want to thank the more than 30 members of our University who invested their talents, abilities, and time in this effort. They include -

The Emergency Situations Student Support Committee -

Dan Burcham, co-chair - Vice President for Student Affairs
Ann Gillespie, co-chair - Assistant Professor, University College
Ashley Atteberry - Director of Student Judicial Services, Office of Student Conduct
Mike Cairns - Associate Vice President for Student Affairs
Jeff Hardesty - Assistant Professor, Welding Engineering Technology
Tim Jacobs - Sergeant, Department of Public Safety
Ken Plas - Staff Attorney, General Counsel Office
Jon Shaffer - Director of Housing, Residential Life
Paul Sullivan - Director, Counseling Center and Birkam Health Center
Janice Weaver - Associate Professor, Social Sciences
Leroy Wright - Dean of Student Life

The Information Technology Communications Task Force

John Urbanick, co-chair - Chief Technology Officer, Leader
Greg Gogolin, co-chair - Professor, Finance and Information Systems
Scott Claerhout - Technical Services Coordinator, Computer Technology Services
Sidney Eaton - Network Technician, Enterprise Technology Services
Elizabeth Funck - Student Government
Tim Jacobs - Sergeant, Department of Public Safety
Leah Nixon - Assistant Director, News Services
Charles Peirce - Student Government
Christopher Pommerenke - Technology Services Coordinator, Computer Technology
Cecil Queen - Associate Professor, Criminal Justice
Craig Roach - Technician, Telecommunications Services
Dawn Schavey - Admissions Officer, FSU-GR
Jon Shaffer - Director of Housing, Residential Life
Allen Sutherby - Cable Television Technician, Telecommunications Technology Services
Christina Weber - Manager, Risk Management and Insurance

Security Infrastructure Task Force

Tom Behler, co-chair - Professor, Social Sciences
Marty Bledsoe, co-chair - Director, Public Safety
Roger Bula - Environmental Engineer, Physical Plant
Jim Cook - Assistant Director, Public Safety
Warren Hills - Associate Vice President, Human Resources
Mike Hughes - Associate Vice President, Physical Plant
Mike McKay - Safety Coordinator, Human Resources

Please take time to read and consider the materials in the task force reports, which are available here - (<http://www.ferris.edu/president/>). A similar analysis will be conducted for materials on the recent tragedy at Northern Illinois University.

Each of us hopes that there will not be tragedies like those at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University. Beyond merely hoping, however, good preparation could prevent or minimize such an event. Please make your participation in future education, training, planning and drills a very high priority.

Thank you for helping make Ferris State University a place that is both welcoming and safe.

Sincerely,

David L. Eisler
President