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Strategies for Smaller Campuses: Lessons on Campus Planning for a Higher Education Consortium

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RESILIENT CAMPUSES: LESSONS FROM A CONSORTIUM OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Universities and colleges, at their core, provide students with an opportunity to expand their thinking, gain practical skills and grow personally and professionally through a structured series of experiences. Yet, disasters can interrupt traditional place-based education and prove to be intractable policy problems. The challenges of developing robust plans and drilling them extensively – key elements of building resilient campuses – seems most pronounced among smaller college and university campuses. This paper describes how three small to moderately-sized higher education institutions in Whatcom County, Washington – a technical college, a community college and a regional university -- formed the Resilient Bellingham Consortium to support each other in better preparing for emergencies and enhancing their resilience to campus-based disaster events, despite limited resources. Internally, all three institutions struggled to find the capacity to do emergency drilling. Unique campus cultures enhanced or detracted from emergency planning, but all three assessed their planning as inadequate. The formation of the Consortium allowed for a more efficient strategy and better exploration of resilience in the context of smaller institutions. Together the institutions built common templates, hired joint staff and created a suit of joint exercises appropriate for their small size and campus-specific needs. In the process, they shared perspective, and ultimately resources, and developed strategies for improving preparedness on small campuses through sharing strategies and leveraging resources.

INTRODUCTION

Universities and colleges, at their core, provide students with an opportunity to expand their thinking, gain practical skills and grow personally and professionally through a structured series of experiences. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims the access to learning and its support systems as an inherent human right.

Yet, disasters can interrupt traditional place-based education (SchWeber, 2008, pp. 13-19,44-54) and prove to be intractable policy problems. Colleges and universities cannot readily use their existing resources to eliminate them, nor does addressing these events even fall under their core mission responsibility. Even more challenging, outcomes of these events depend upon a host of factors outside the institution's control (Waugh, 1988). Earthquakes can damage off-campus infrastructure, shutting down campus operations. Hurricanes and wildfires can displace students and staff, sometimes indefinitely. Active shooters -- and their portrayal in the media -- can derail the community's sense of safety. Moreover, the handling of these events and others can shape a university's reputation for years to follow.

To provide safety, colleges and universities must have strategies for addressing natural hazards, disease outbreaks, accidents and willful acts of violence - earthquakes, hurricanes, H1N1 outbreaks, chemical spills, active shooters and the like. Their strategy must address these events in ways that protect students, faculty and staff while also ensuring the core mission of education is able to continue. They must plan for and respond resiliently to these events – that is, they must be able to experience change and disturbance, such as the disasters described above, without losing integrity or the ability to achieve core missions (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2003; Folke et al., 2003; Gunderson, 2000; Holling, 1973; Manyena, 2006; Peterson et al., 1998). When colleges and universities respond resiliently to hurricanes, floods, fires, and emergencies, they are able to not only limit immediate impacts, but continue supporting student educational obtainment and scholarly excellence– supported by faculty retention, financial solvency and administrative leadership. Moreover, they are able to learn and adapt to reduce future vulnerability to future threats.

This paper describes how three small to moderately-sized higher education institutions in Whatcom County, Washington formed the Resilient Bellingham Consortium to support each other in better preparing for emergencies and enhancing their resilience to campus-based disaster events, despite limited resources. In the process, they shared perspective, and ultimately resources, and developed strategies for improving preparedness on small campuses through sharing strategies and leveraging resources.

In the following section, I examine the impacts natural hazards and malicious events can have on college and university missions and reputations. I then explore the current state of emergency planning at colleges and universities, before describing the Resilient Bellingham Consortium, including threats, capacities and the challenges each institution faced in creating resilient campuses able and ready to

respond to emergencies and disasters. I then highlight Consortium strategies for supporting each campus's own and each other's resilience. Those strategies included creating compatible plans, building cultures of safety, jointly exercising, and sharing staff. By leveraging their resources and working together, they were able to improve their own emergency planning and enhance their ability to support each other during future emergencies.

DISASTER IMPACTS ON HIGHER EDUCATION CAMPUSES

By far, the most defining images of a disaster enveloping a college or university campus came out of New Orleans as Hurricane Katrina passed and the city's levees were breached. Dillard University suffered some $400 million in damages due to 8-foot high floodwaters across its campus. At Southern University of New Orleans, all buildings became unusable from flood and wind damage (Foggs et al., 2006). Every building at Xavier University was flooded with over six feet of water, leaving toxic sludge and rampant mold in its wake (Tarr et al., 2007). Science departments lost expensive machinery due to the prolonged power failure; others lost decades-old repositories, lab specimens or had to euthanize entire strains of laboratory animals (Raloff, 2005; Tarr et al., 2007). Several city campuses were completely shut down following the levee breeches, creating ripple impacts on campuses across the nation.

With sustained damage across so many campuses and within days of fall semester start, New Orleans colleges and universities scrambled to support students' educational plans. Universities attempted to contact employees and students via blog sites and mass advising sessions at host universities; all local cell and land lines were inoperable (Tarr et al., 2007). They scrambled to access off-site backups of records and re-establish temporary mainframes for essential IT services (Tarr et al., 2007).

Outside the impact zone, Louisiana State University opened up their basketball arena and field house to triage and refer 15,000 evacuees to appropriate services; their veterinary school took in 1,500 pets. This and other universities absorbed hundreds of displaced students, and sometimes the impacted family members of their own students (Donahue & O'Keefe, 2007; Mangan et al., 2005). The influx meant scheduling additional sections, higher advising loads, and working with private and public agencies off campus to secure housing, transportation and financial deferment (Chew et al., 2005). At Our Lady of Holy Cross College, a college spared from flooding on the east bank of New Orleans, the campus hosted a formal command post and operations base for military and government working on disaster response and recovery (Johnson, 2011).

Yet, true to their core missions, the impacted colleges and universities founds ways of supporting their students' educational dreams. Within two weeks of Katrina, 153 higher education institutions partnered with the Southern Regional Education Board and the Sloan Foundation to provide a *Sloan Semester* database of online courses for Louisiana and Mississippi college students to access from any location. About 1,700 students registered for the 1,345 free courses offered through the database (SchWeber, 2008). Even after student return, faculty taught heavier loads, offering a full set of academic courses from January to August to assist students who had been unable to find host institutions or take courses online (Tarr et al., 2007).

Returning to New Orleans, students, faculty and staff faced starkly new physical settings for engaging with one another. At its reopening spring semester, Dillard University contacted with Riverside Hilton Hotel and the World Trade Center of New Orleans to convert hotel rooms into classrooms, offices and living spaces (David, 2006). Southern University of New Orleans also rented hotel rooms and used a middle school as temporary classrooms when trailers ordered for spring semester did not arrive in time (Foggs et al., 2006). Dillard students took shuttle buses to Tulane University where post-Katrina institutional agreements allowed Dillard students to take science class and use the library (Foggs et al., 2006).

But college and university response to Hurricane Katrina was not without considerable financial loss. FEMA provided some reimbursement for repair costs, but not reimbursement for the salary needed to retain faculty (Johnson, 2011). Some of the historic black colleges and private universities made up for unreimbursed losses through large private donations, but these donations did not necessarily reflect the damage experienced with heavily damaged Southern University of New Orleans receiving little (Johnson, 2011). More critically, all institutions lost students. Dillard University had an enrollment decrease of 50%, Xavier and Tulane lost about a quarter, and others nearly a fifth of enrollment in the year following the hurricane (Mangan et al., 2005).

The high cost of repair and loss of enrollment resulted in deep impacts to faculty and staff. While universities and colleges drawing from outside the region fared better than institutions drawing from the displaced local population (Feder, 2006), all cut faculty and staff. Following Hurricane Katrina, Southern University closed 19 programs. Tulane laid off 200 professors in engineering and medicine; Dillard and Xavier Universities cut faculty and staff by a third or more (Foggs et al., 2006). Xavier filed for financial exigency and then fired tenured and non-tenured faculty alike. Faculty moral at some institutions plummeted with some remaining faculty leaving and others staying but remaining distrustful of administrative recovery decisions (Feder, 2006). At Loyola University, where physical damage was minimal, a drop in returning students resulted in an estimated $20 million shortfall. The president openly asked older faculty to consider retirement and remaining faculty took on heavier teaching loads (Foggs et al., 2006).

While less publicized, the University of Iowa experienced similar devastation during the 2010 flooding of the Iowa River, which snaked through campus. In total, the university suffered $734 million from flood damage to a dormitory, the campus union building, the university's advanced technology laboratory, auditorium, museum of art and school of art and music. With floodwaters still covering campus, administrators sought creative strategies for fulfilling its core educational mission. Relocating music and art programs to the downtown and an empty big box store, respectively, proved a temporary and surprisingly invigorating fix. Yet, reconstruction, with a keen eye to reducing future flood risk, is likely to take a decade to complete (Biemiller, 2010).

Less physically damaging, but drawing much more national scrutiny, was the 2007 shooting of 32 faculty and students at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, often called Virginia Tech. The convened Policy Group of senior administrators was perceived as slow to notify campus students, staff, faculty and parents during the incident and chaotic in its interactions with media following the event.

The litigation and review of university actions continued to shape perceptions of Virginia Tech for years after and heightened concern nationally over how to identify and support students showing mental health distress (Sander & Coddington, 2011).

Similar challenges exist to unique hazards found elsewhere. In 2003, a bushfire front swept through the Mount Stromlo campus of the Australian National University in Canberra. While the crisis management team helped swiftly evacuate the campus and no lives were lost, the fire scorched 23 out of the 29 major buildings and residential houses. Five years later, the campus has used insurance claims to partially rebuild damaged structures, and has re-established core educational and research services, but the campus lost its iconic telescope and has not regained the visitor traffic to its once beautiful forested campus (Meehan, 2007).

More recently, the University of Canterbury, located in Christchurch New Zealand, experienced a major earthquake in February 2011 after having experienced a similarly sized event only five months earlier. Swarms of aftershocks between and following these two earthquakes, have left emergency response personnel, students and faculty exhausted. Administrators orchestrated the full evacuation of their campus just two days into the semester, construction of temporary facilities to house activities in eight heavily damaged university buildings, and resume teaching under an accelerated schedule three weeks after the event. Over the first eighteen months following the first earthquake, they have had to evacuate and reassess building safety on 29 different occasions (Seville et al., August 2012).

Whether facing flood, hurricane, fire or malicious events, college and university campuses have multiple hazards for which to plan, yet often lack the resources to do so efficiently.

CAMPUS EMERGENCY PLANNING

Planning for emergencies at colleges and universities has proven to be a challenge. Studies of campus emergency management show a lack of readiness across the nation. A National Campus Safety and Security Project, started in 2008 by the National Association of College and University Business Officers, found that leadership, communication, building security and mutual aid needed strengthening on higher education campuses. Most universities combined emergency preparedness with other responsibilities (Hyatt, 2010; Marincioni & Fraboni, 2012). Many colleges and university campuses have first responders but lack emergency planners who can strategically plan for preparedness, response, mitigation and recovery from these events (Worsley & Beckering, 2007).

As Rowe notes, campuses, with their deliberative culture, are frequently slow to respond and adapt to infrequent incidences like campus shootings. In a study examining when Texas four-year colleges and universities review and revise their emergency plans, she found these institutions only included a written plan for active shooter threat after the highly publicized 1999 Columbine High School shooting and most revised their plans following the Virginia Tech shooting (Rowe, 2009). Emergency planning was, at its essence, a reaction to past events.

Worsley and Beckering (2007) find that to address campus security threats, campuses must develop and maintain emergency planning; especially critical was the need to address training and exercises. In a

report summarizing an inquiry into the Virginia Tech shooting, among the key lessons was the need to create appropriate higher education emergency plans that fit the specific needs and contexts of their institutions. Furthermore, the committee noted plans must be exercised and the people most likely to be involved in decision-making or response needed to practice together (Davies, 2010). Campuses that experienced the impact of Hurricane Katrina came to a similar conclusion. Tarr et al. (2007) state the best way to avoid substantial losses from a major emergency is to have a robust and well-rehearsed plan at all levels of the university.

Yet few campuses engage in drill exercises to test and evaluate their emergency plans. In a 2012 survey of campus emergency managers, Sullivan found that on less than a third of the campuses responding to the survey, senior administrators participated in one or more annual drills. These findings led Sullivan to conclude that higher level management did not significantly support the operationalization of campus emergency management. The lack of drilling would pose problems when emergency response was needed (Sullivan, 2012), a fact Australian National University-Canberra Mount Stromlo campus administrators and senior managers luckily realized prior to the 2003 blaze sweeping their campus. Through tabletop exercises, university administrators realized emergency situations often deteriorated rapidly. In response to this tabletop exercise lessons, they developed training programs to teach informed, but rapid, decision making under pressure. It was because of this drilling and incorporation of lessons learned that they were able to successfully respond and recover from the 2003 bushfire (Meehan, 2007).

The challenges of developing robust plans and drilling them extensively – key elements of building resilient campuses – seems most pronounced among smaller college and university campuses. A 2008 national survey of student life officers and campus safety officers found that only a third had conducted tabletop or emergency exercises, with smaller institutions being less likely to do so (Hyatt, 2010). While larger state college systems have been able to pool emergency planning resources across multiple campuses and smaller private colleges have sought to apply best practices from other institutions (Hyatt, 2010, pp. 13-19, 43-54), many smaller colleges and universities have few resources for planning and drilling emergency response and recovery.

In a novel approach, the Resilient Bellingham Consortium sought to pool resources across multiple independent institutions in order to learn from and support one another. In the process, they attempted to address the resource limitations typical of smaller regional and local public colleges and universities.

RESILIENT BELLINGHAM CONSORTIUM

In 2009, three public institutions located in Bellingham, Washington -- Western Washington University, Whatcom Community College, and Bellingham Technical College -- formed the Resilient Bellingham Consortium to support each other in building campus resilience to emergencies and disasters. That same year, they applied for and received a $512,000 grant from the U.S Department of Education through the department's Emergency Management for Higher Education program. The grant's aim was to create emergency response plans using the standardized federal National Incident Management System,

promote better coordination between community and campus partners, address campus recovery, and create new mechanisms to plan for disaster that address each campus's unique challenges.

Local Hazards

The three consortium institutions faced a wide range of potentially damaging hazards, despite their location in a relatively rural and modestly populated county. With three international crossings into Canada, a major federal interstate highway and four key oil pipelines, an active volcano, and proximity to the Cascadia Subduction Zone fault beneath the Pacific Ocean, there was much for which to be prepared based upon geography alone. Being home to a university also brought campus-related concerns, such as disease outbreak in the densely populated dormitories and active shooter threats.

Two of the three campuses had recently experienced significant emergency incidents. In 1995, Western Washington University confirmed 12 cases of measles on campus. The outbreak prompted the campus health center to set up a mandatory vaccination program for its 11,000 students, faculty and staff, a program that in two weeks vaccinated 97.1% of the students and cleared them to attend class. In the same year, Whatcom Community College responded to an abusive husband confronting his wife, a student, on campus. He fired 24 bullets from a semi-automatic pistol, killing his wife and twice hitting a car of a student driving nearby. The college president and two others managed to subdue and hold the shooter until emergency responders arrived.

Local Capacities

While located in the same small city, each institution has unique educational missions and context in which to plan for emergencies.

- The largest institution, Western Washington University, is a masters-granting public university serving approximately 15,000 students, drawing many students from the Seattle-Tacoma metro area. The university has a campus police department employing 15 officers who have primary responsibility for law enforcement on campus. The university also has a half-time emergency manager, reporting to the director of the university's Environmental Health and Safety department who engages in some emergency planning as part of her wider responsibilities and reports to the Vice President of Business and Financial Affairs. Emergency planning is guided by a 25-member Emergency Management Committee of key administrators and faculty and staff representatives. The committee meets quarterly to evaluate and pursue strategies for improved emergency planning, mitigation, response and recovery. Compared to larger institutions, the university has a small Emergency Operations Center and very limited emergency management employees.

- Whatcom Community College, a comprehensive two-year college serving approximately 12,000 students, equivalent to 4,000 full time equivalent students, is situated in the newly developing outskirts of the City of Bellingham. The college does not have a campus police force, relying instead on local Bellingham Policy Department. Prior to the grant, the college had no formal emergency plan. No single person is responsible for emergency planning; instead the Vice President for Administrative Services and the Facilities and Operations Manager address

emergency planning issues as they have time and again in addition to their regular responsibilities.

- Bellingham Technical College, located in a residential neighborhood on the bluffs above Bellingham Bay, was established in 1957 as a vocational school, and currently serves approximately 8,600 students, equivalent to 2,600 full-time equivalent students a year. The college-wide Safety Committee -- comprised of 14 administrators, staff, faculty and students -- works to prevent and manage situations that may disrupt learning. This committee meets regularly to review student and staff safety matters. They also develop and disseminate safety education throughout the campus. Many of the committee members serve as building safety inspectors and building evacuation representatives during safety drills. The technical college has no employee strictly dedicated to emergency planning, nor does it have a campus police force. The Vice President of Administrative Services handles emergency planning as responsibilities allow. The college has a nursing program, but at the time of the grant, had not considered how to integrate these students into an emergency response.

LEVERAGING RESOURCES, ENHANCING RESILIENCE

The Resilient Bellingham Consortium grant became an impetus for improving emergency planning across all three higher education campuses. With only a single half-time staff person responsible for emergency planning at one of the institutions, capacity to develop plans, execute exercises and increase staff and administrative training was limited. Institutional cultures also had their impact. Through the grant, the consortium hired two full-time staff and set out to improve each campus's resilience. Importantly, the consortium created an opportunity to leverage resources across the institutions, a strategy to address the challenges these institutions face as small and moderately-sized colleges and universities.

Challenges of emergency planning

As part of the Resilient Bellingham Consortium grant, Consortium representatives discussed the challenges of creating and maintaining emergency plans for their campuses. The 1995 measles outbreak and active shooter event typify the threats these campuses expect to experience –the events could significantly impact campus safety and disrupt student learning, yet were not frequent enough to create a sense of response proficiency. Consortium members lamented how their campuses remained ill prepared for both responding internally to such events and in coordinating with other agencies externally.

Internally, all three institutions struggled to find the capacity to do emergency drilling. The International Fire Code 2009, required in Washington Administrative Code and City of Bellingham ordinance, mandated at least an annual fire drill in educational and business occupancies. Yet, the drilling that did occur seemed insufficient. A Whatcom Community College administrator explained, "We do some sort of drill every quarter, but it winds up being less than we want." At Western Washington University, emergency planners noted faculty protesting even mandatory fire drilling, saying they did not have "slush time" in their syllabi on the short 11-week quarter system. Consortium members wondered

whether faculty and other administrators understood how a hazard event could become an overarching threat to instruction, or even more elementally, to their steady supply of students.

All three institutions noted the immense time commitment a well-conducted drill required. Prior to the drill or exercise, the drill organizer had to get administrative approval and buy in from those participating and affected. The organizer had to assemble materials, schedule participants, and plan and conduct the actual exercise. With a dedicated staff person, Western Washington University was able to regularly conduct small exercises, but the other to colleges struggled to meet their requirements in anything more than an ad hoc way. As a Bellingham Technical College administrator commented, "We wind up picking just something and doing the bare minimum, rather than providing the full spectrum of training we need."

At the formation of the Consortium, few staff and administrators at any of the institutions had completed the recommended FEMA online and classroom training courses in the Incident Command System and National Incident Management System. At Western Washington University, only half of the top administrators and one of their eight administrative assistants, had any training. Most of the staff assigned to a confined space rescue team, nor any of the parking staff had completed any training. University police officers and dispatchers had some training, but none had completed all the required courses. At Whatcom Community College, only nine of 24 administrators and staff expected to take leadership positions had any training. Bellingham Technical College had the highest ratio; nine of the 15 administrators and staff had at least some training in the Incident Command System.

Administrators were often difficult to engage in ongoing Incident Command System training – trainings were seen as less critical than the many other issues these administrators dealt with on a more immediate time scale. The gap, often of several years, between significant campus emergencies reinforced a sense of safety and complacency. Rather, smaller incidents – student suicides, protests, threats and the like – were handled successfully without using an incident command system, making some administrators dismissive of the need for such a formalized approach to unexpected events. Exacerbating the problem, administrators and first responders who did have adequate training would matriculate, taking the knowledge and skills they had gained with them.

College and university campus culture shaped each institution's ability to achieve training goals and enhance preparedness through exercises. At Western Washington University, department cultures varied from a "train everyone" to a "train no one" approach, making institution-wide coordination more difficult. In contrast, at the Bellingham Technical College, a "safety culture" was integral to both curriculum and institution reputation. Adding emergency response training to ongoing safety training was seen as a natural extension, to which faculty, staff and administration would be receptive.

Similarly, campus culture shaped the degree to which top administrators chose to use Incident Command approaches to emergencies. In a post-exercise debriefing as part of the grant, a top administrator noted he struggled with the difference between collegiate communication – notable for debate, celebration of divergent perspectives, critique and consensus building before decision-making – with the hierarchical communication and decision-making protocols of the Incident Command System.

This and other high-level administrators expressed hesitancy with instigating an incident command system due to the perceived conflict in system values, and preferred to handle frequent events and small emergencies (e.g. student deaths, campus protests, security threats) using a more deliberative and unstructured processes. Other response personnel worried top administrators would not be able to effectively coordinate with government agencies in a significant event, given their low training levels and their lack of practice with the system in smaller events. Campus administrators would not be able to "call most of the shots" as they were able to do regarding other campus issues.

Externally, off-campus coordination with local governmental agencies such as city police and city and county emergency managers and responders had been successful, but somewhat limited prior to the initiation of the Consortium. At Western Washington University, campus police regularly partnered with local law enforcement to conduct active shooter exercises in campus buildings. But, large scale city, county and regional exercises – to which higher education institutions were invited to participate – did not always have relevance for campus emergency response. A multi-jurisdictional exercise in 2011 focused on an aviation accident; one in 2009 focused on a terrorist attack at the Canadian border. In 2010, the city of Bellingham changed its exercise plan away from building damage assessment, a skill the college and university emergency response teams were keen on continuing to practice.

Even when a small quorum of staff and administrators had training and an exercise was carried out, Consortium members were uncertain of their efficacy. As one member stated, "without facilitators, many times exercises point out what is wrong, but there is no opportunity to change the overall approach to make it work better. . . suggestions during exercises are cost intensive and are not supported with follow-up funding." More critically, the drills and exercises generally happened without broader institutional awareness at Western Washington University and Whatcom Community College. Students and faculty – the core academic portion of the institutions – did not know about the drills, lessons or decisions about whether improvements could or should be made. Students and faculty "don't even know they happened." Even when campus-wide drills did occur, such as during the testing of campus-wide enunciation systems, faculty complained about the disruptions, showing little understanding of the drill objectives or the importance of their participation.

Compatible Emergency Response Plans

One of the first tasks of the Consortium was to create or update emergency response plans for each institution. At Consortium initiation, Both Western Washington University and Bellingham Technical College had existing emergency response plans. The university's plan was updated every three years, often with significant changes made by top administrators with only limited expertise in emergency planning. While having a comprehensive plan in place, Western Washington University wanted to focus on expanding planning for persons with disabilities, pandemic, active shooter and continuity of operations. The technical college's plan, created in 1993, was the responsibility of the Administrative Services Department and had been updated only once in 2008, despite a requirement of annual review. Furthermore, the plan fell short of being comprehensive and needed updating in the same areas as the university's. Whatcom Community College did not have any emergency plan. Instead, the community college had a desk reference for emergencies, a compilation of hazard specific pages.

Rather than work on each institution's emergency response plan separately, the formation of the Consortium allowed for a more efficient strategy. Consortium staff hired through the grant reviewed response plans from a range of higher education institutions and created an emergency response template appropriate for all three institutions. The ordering of sections and formatting were jointly agreed upon. The institutions also agreed to a traditional Incident Command System structure – comprised of operations, logistics, planning and finance/administration leaders under an Incident Commander – with an Executive Policy Group of top administrators guiding strategic planning and ensuring response and recovery best addressed institutional mission and values.

Using Western Washington University's existing plan, staff organized and improved the university's plan following this template. As each relevant section of the Western emergency response plan was drafted, Consortium staff passed the section on to administrators at Whatcom Community College and Bellingham Technical College. Administrators adapted the draft template for their own institutions, modifying descriptions, procedures and persons responsible. They also worked with Consortium staff to identify and enhance plans for unique aspects of their institution. Content related to residents halls were removed but flood risk, a significant hazard at the two smaller institutions but not at the university, was added.

The common template has multiple advantages. For the technical and community college, using a thoroughly readable plan from university reduced the resources needed to create their own plan. This resource-saving aspect was crucial for the colleges, which had not designated staff directly responsible for emergency planning. They were able to efficiently review the university's updated plan elements and delete unnecessary elements. Moreover, Consortium members noted that a consistent template would make comparison, joint response and updating easier. Each institution committed to informing each other if they made changes to their plans based upon drills, actual incidences or new federal or state requirements.

Building Cultures of Safety

Western Washington University and Whatcom Community College were also able to learn from the safety culture institutionalized at Bellingham Technical College. In exploring different approaches to providing safety information, Western Washington University and Whatcom Community College learned that Bellingham Technical College showed a video to all faculty, staff and students on the first day of classes explaining vocational safety and reporting procedures. Moreover, when necessary, they were able to update all staff of changes to emergency or safety procedures during monthly all-faculty meetings and periodic all-staff meetings. Seeing all students, faculty and staff as targets for campus safety information helped shift the focus and distribution strategy for emergency planning information and a grant-funded video.

Modeling after Bellingham Technical College's approach, Whatcom Community College took advantage of its smaller size to share emergency preparedness procedures with all staff and faculty. The college developed a two-hour introduction to campus emergency planning and the incident command system as part of their All College Day, held before the start of the academic year and attended by staff and faculty. The intent was to give everyone "a little bit of ICS," knowing that very few would take the

training but all might experience a campus emergency. The number of Western Washington University's faculty and staff precluded a similar approach, but the university is now looking for opportunities to introduce basic emergency procedures to a wider audience.

One area where Western Washington University was able to successfully expand its audience for emergency preparedness information was through a grant-funded training video about classroom and campus emergency information. The original intent was to distribute the video to faculty to support them in providing emergency information to their students. However, seeing the technical college's approach to building a safety culture throughout the campus community, the video target audience shifted. When filmed, it assumed a broader student, faculty, and staff audience. To reach students, the video will be made available to incoming students as part of new student summer programming and follow-up email contact. It will also will run on TV monitors in campus common areas during the start of the academic year. It will also be distributed via campus online news and links sent to faculty and staff. The film script and actors are being adapted for Whatcom Community College; Bellingham Technical College plans to add emergency preparedness procedures to their existing safety video.

Exercise Collaboration

As part of the Department of Education grant, the Resilient Bellingham Consortium created a half-day joint tabletop exercise focusing on a campus active shooter incident occurring on the Western campus. All three higher education institutions participated, as did the Bellingham police and fire departments, and the city/county unified emergency management officers. The exercise was aimed at not only practicing Incident Command System processes, but providing an opportunity to cultivate community partnerships across higher education institutions and local government agencies and to discuss challenges of such an incident.

During the half-day exercise, the local fire chief introduced concepts underlying incident command in a higher education setting, the goals of the exercise, and specific types of active shooter incidents. The presentation was followed by introduction of an active shooter scenario and two breakout discussions. Representatives from agencies and institutions sat around tables organized into executive policy, command, operations, planning, logistics and finance/administration groups. As such, administrators from each institution sat and worked with counterpart colleagues at the other two institutions, along with the city fire chief who acted as exercise facilitator.

During the breakout discussions, each group discussed how each of the three higher education institutions would approach the incident and the challenges it would create in their context. Participants noted how helpful it was to simply hear lessons learned at other institutions and experience the different perspectives arising from unique institutional cultures and educational missions. The smaller colleges noted the advantages of having staff and administrators with potential leadership positions in an incident command system working in the same buildings on a daily basis. They were more familiar with each other and could more swiftly set up an incident command system. As a larger university, Western Washington University participants did not necessarily know the people with whom they would work very well and their emergency operations center was physically distant from most people's offices. Yet, the larger university has enough staff to provide personnel relief in longer incidents; while the

smaller colleges realized they would quickly need to ask for assistance from partner organizations, including Western Washington University.

In reporting on their discussions, the groups also exposed a range of issues for which established policy was limited or vague. For example:

- The executive policy group found that no institution had a clear decision protocol for deciding when and whether to start incident command. They realized the relationship between the public information officer and the executive policy group needed clarification and that their job was to think forward and plan for next steps, especially considering how response and recovery could best support educational continuity and institutional reputation. They also came to the conclusion their institutions needed to trigger incident command more frequently to gain practice.
- The command group realized they needed a structured method for receiving and incorporating executive policy group input. They also discussed nuances in when and how to shift from a first responder acting as incident commander to, based on incident type, a top administrator taking over that incident command role.
- The operations group discussed how to safely bring incident command personnel together. Western staff noted they would need to create talking points for residential hall staff. They also quickly realized that un-impacted schools could be valuable resources.
- The logistics section asked whether and how day care would need to be provided for responder's children or housing for arriving family members of students. They asked each other how to best manage and house volunteers, wondering how each institution could refuse donations or volunteers.
- The finance/administration section was able to discuss cash on hand needs at the different institutions and how best to collect and document data important for expense reimbursements and payments.

As an interesting outcome of the exercise, participants began to raise possibilities for working together, especially during community recovery. Bellingham Technical College and Whatcom Community College suggested they could send crews, counselors, and food services over to support Western in the exercise scenario. They also suggested libraries, classrooms and large arenas of un-impacted institutions may be useful in incidents where another institution experienced infrastructure damage or ongoing criminal investigation. They further posited faculty could engage in substitute instruction for incapacitated colleagues or support each in other ways across institutions.

Consortium members noted that with a shared exercise and newly created emergency plans based upon a shared template, they felt more comfortable with the possibility of jointly responding to a community-wide event or bringing in administrators or staff from an unaffected institution to assist or relieve administrators and staff involved in a large or lengthy incident at another institution.

The joint exercise was seen as a success and Consortium representatives wanted to continue working together on future exercises. A Whatcom Community College representative noted how difficult it

would have been for their college to create, organize and facilitate a large tabletop or other simulation exercise given their lack of dedicated emergency planning staff. Together the group developed the concept of an "exercise in a box." They asked grant staff to develop template exercise scenarios appropriate for their regional threats and a higher education campus context such that individual institutions could separately or jointly drill more easily in the future. The resulting exercise template walked administrators or staff through the process of conceptualization and development of an exercise. Included in the exercise template are five generic scenarios appropriate for the Consortium campuses – earthquake and damage assessment, disease outbreak, active shooter, civil unrest and bomb threat. Each includes areas for extensions and suggestions for modification such that the institutions could rotate through the exercises and add novel elements each repetition or modify what aspect of the response the exercise would most intently practice.

Joint Hiring

Through the process of jointly creating an emergency response plan template and exercising an active shooter incident together, the Consortium institutions were keen on continuing collaboration even after the completion of the grant. Each institution agreed it was too small to support a new or additional staff member engaged in emergency management. Yet each also noted the grant collaboration had shown the value of combining resources.

As the grant period neared completion, all three institutions verbally agreed to jointly finance a new half-time staff position. This staff person will be responsible for priorities jointly determined by all three institutions. At the time of writing, the institutions plan to have the staff member be responsible for developing a standardized training schedule for both classroom based Incident Command System and Community Emergency Response Training course available to all three campuses. The new staff person will also continue to develop better relationships with agencies outside of higher education. Current grant staff have joined regional incident management teams and local municipal emergency planning committees or response teams. Furthermore, the three higher education institutions are planning a tabletop exercise with the local county health department to better prepare for a joint response to a campus or community disease outbreak.

All institutions noted how administrators and staff wanted further opportunities to practice their emergency response roles in a higher education setting. A future task of the staff member is to develop specialized refresher courses and role-exercises for all staff and administrators likely to perform specific roles in a campus incident. Further, the staff member will create a regular exercise schedule and help institutions use their "exercise in a box."Joint exercises including all three institutions and local response agencies will likely continue, with hosting of these exercises rotating between Consortium member institutions.

Consortium members are hopeful that joint training and exercise schedules will create an atmosphere of collegiate competition and accountability. As one administrator stated, "Up until now, we've just told ourselves we should really do X. But we wind up doing just enough to figure out we're really messed up." A dedicated staff member and the responsibility to host trainings for all Consortium institutions will likely increase the quality and consistency of training and exercise. It may also shift focus from

perfecting an emergency plan to building cross department and cross institutional relationships. The opportunities for a process-focused assessment – one that examines where and how actions deviate from plans and how context may shift appropriate response actions – may emerge, and with it, a more nuanced approach to emergency planning (Molina, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Past campus emergencies show the potential impacts of these threats, while research shows the crucial importance of all institutions engaging in a process-oriented strategy of creating an emergency response plan and then frequently and flexibly exercising this plan with those likely to engage in response and recovery.

Despite the imperative to plan and practice, small and moderately-sized public colleges and universities face many of the same threats as their larger and private institutions, but often with significantly less human and capital resources from which to respond. Staff at these institutions engaged in emergency planning are often saddled with competing priorities and campus cultures that make sustained and frequent drilling difficult.

To address these challenges to emergency planning and drilling, three small and moderately-sized higher education institutions in Bellingham, Washington formed a consortium to support one another in enhancing their ability to flexibly respond to and learn from emergencies they were likely to experience. As a consortium, the institutions were able to draw on each other's strengths. The university with an existing emergency response plan was able to share plan sections as templates for the others to follow. The technical college, with its focus on engaging all campus members in a culture of safety, prompted the other two to more broadly engage faculty, staff and students in emergency preparedness and response messaging. Together, all three institutions were able to jointly create and invite local response agencies to drill an active shooter exercise. They were able to build familiarity working with cross-institutional colleagues and local agency representatives; moreover, by jointly drilling, they were able to engage local agencies in priorities of particular concern to campus communities. Together, these experiences led the three institutions to jointly hire a half-time staff person dedicated to organizing future trainings, improving campus preparedness, and further enhancing a resilience-focused partnership across the institutions. This consortium model, much like the cross-campus emergency planning of large, multi-campus universities, leverages existing resources and focuses on the process of developing partnerships, an important consideration for all small and moderately-sized public higher education institutions in an era of strained resources.

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