

**How Do You Prepare Your Community for Disaster?
A Report of the Fourth Annual Disaster Preparedness Summit**

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The Community College National Center for Community Engagement and the League for Innovation in the Community College hosted the fourth annual Disaster Summit on March 20, 2006, in Atlanta, GA, as a part of the League's Innovations conference. Continuing in its purpose to aid community colleges in the creation and improvement of disaster preparedness plans, the Summit offered speakers and information with specific examples drawn from the August /September 2005 Katrina and Rita hurricane disasters on the Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama Gulf of Mexico coastlines. Of special interest were ways in which community colleges had used local disasters to foster service learning opportunities and civic engagement for their students and communities.

Disasters impact communities each year. Sometimes such disasters impact the operations of colleges within those communities. But regardless of the direct impact of a local disaster on the college campus, community colleges often become central to the local community's response to the disaster. Community colleges report that they are increasingly playing key roles in the development and implementation of community disaster plans. The college may be named an evacuation site. It may be the location for various disaster drills held by emergency providers. Or the college may provide specific training for first responders.

As the community college increasingly fills the needs of its local constituency for disaster services, the college finds many new opportunities to engage its faculty, staff, and students in direct aid. Also, following the reality of a local disaster, the college finds its own disaster plan in need of change. One college reported at the Summit that it recently discovered that the college had been named a disaster evacuation site by several community agencies without the college's knowledge! A scramble ensued as the college updated its own plans to accommodate significant community expectations.

The Summit

The 2006 Summit used Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the responses of southern colleges in the paths of the hurricanes as the organizing theme. Keynoting the Monday morning Innovations program, Dr. Walter Bumphus, President of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, provided the background for the day's Summit and emphasis on disaster through his review of the impact of Katrina on the state system.

Katrina's Impact on the Louisiana colleges

At the start of the Fall Semester 2005, Louisiana's Community and Technical College System consisted of 49 campuses, seven of which were community colleges. Enrollment stood at 53,839. The system had received unprecedented support from Louisiana state and local governments, and the future looked bright for continued strengthening and growth for a newly energized system. Delgado Community College in New Orleans was the state's largest with 17,398 students enrolled.

With the arrival of Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent breaching of levees in the New Orleans area, 43% of the system's students were displaced and no longer enrolled. Additionally, 1,400 staff and faculty evacuated or were displaced from their normal college assignments. Although Delgado is now operational, two technical colleges, one located in the demolished 9th Ward in New Orleans, are still closed.

Within 72 hours of the hurricane landfall, the system established a call center in order to find and help displaced students and employees. A website was created providing essential information to students and staff. Hurricane updates were provided to inform others about basic information. The president set up a centralized administrative support office for affected institution (including temporary offices for administrators), and attempts were immediate to restore needed information technology infrastructures. Of special concern were the needs of students in structured programs such as nursing, so efforts were made to find solutions for students to be able to continue their education through relocation, compressed scheduling, distance education, and other options. Neighboring states' community colleges offered help immediately to allow for the temporary admissions of many students from Louisiana.

Daily and weekly meetings between the centralized administrative support office in Baton Rouge and the affected colleges were held to determine what the most critical needs were. Other centralized services included taking responsibly for responding and cataloguing support offers from the nation; the establishment of a relief fund for displaced students, faculty, and staff; and contacting the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to inform them of the disastrous impact suffered at the affected colleges and acquiring approval for delays in accreditation visits scheduled for 2005-06. The Department of Education was likewise informed so that grant-related activities would not be jeopardized at the affected colleges. Public Service Announcements were routinely provided to state and area media outlets to keep communities informed. The Louisiana colleges that had not been affected by the disaster quickly implemented specialized training programs to provide additional workers for construction and repair services. Accelerated workforce programs were coordinated at the systems level.

Dr. Bumphus reported that individuals impacted by Katrina went through the typical grieving process as a result of losses to human life and property. Disbelief quickly was followed by shock, depression and anger. He indicated that regression into earlier grief stages often has been evident in colleagues and students, and, although acceptance, the final grief stage, is more apparent than during the first few months following Katrina,

acceptance is still especially difficult at the campuses most acutely affected. The prayers, volunteer efforts, and the financial contributions of the nation have been essential elements to bolster morale among students and employees in his system.

At the time of the Innovations conference in March 06, the system had received 5 million dollar commitment for Construction Pathways funding, 2.25 million dollars from the Bush/Clinton Katrina Fund, and hundreds of thousands of dollars from friends. However, at the time of the presentation there had still not been money allocated to the system from federal sources. The US Department of Education and the Department of Labor have received funding requests from the system for reconstruction of the destroyed facilities and restoration of revenue losses. The System finally received an executed grant from USDOL around the last week in March of 2006. Still unknown is the amount that Louisiana can provide for capital construction and college operations since tax revenues are still negatively impacted by the effects of the storm. Also, because of the destruction of two technical colleges and significant damage at others, efforts are beginning to restructure with the LCTCS for better services to students and for fiscal efficiencies.

Despite these unknowns and with amazing resiliency, the Louisiana community college system is again growing. Delgado opened its doors for the second semester in January; enrollment in the Louisiana colleges is now to within 10,000 students of its record Fall 05 enrollments. Dr. Bumphus thanked his community college colleagues for their willingness to accept his students mid-term and often without the usual transfer requirements since, in many cases, the students' records were destroyed or unavailable; for volunteering and coming to Louisiana to aid the colleges, students, and staff in clean-up and construction; for sending money and other basic needs to his area; and for their prayers and contacts to him and others during this crisis.

Following the presentation and an emotional standing ovation for Dr. Bumphus and Louisiana colleagues, the League for Innovation in Community Colleges committed to Dr. Bumphus ten percent of the conference proceeds to be used in efforts to restore services at Community and technical colleges in Louisiana.

The Morning Panel

Following the keynote session, the Summit activity commenced with a panel presentation. Panelists were Dr. Martha Ellis, President of Lee College in Baytown, TX; Clark Friesen, speech professor and service learning coordinator from Tomball College, Tomball, TX; and Lyvier Conss, Executive Director of the Community College National Center for Community Engagement.

The Lee College Story

Dr. Martha Ellis reminded participants that natural disasters of such proportions as Katrina and Rita create long term human effects, whether physical, emotional or spiritual. Support for students, staff, and community members will be essential for years to come.

Lee College received a call from the Red Cross immediately after Katrina hit requesting use of the college gym for Louisiana-Mississippi-Alabama evacuees. Due to the large number of evacuees, the local community center became the shelter. The college was requested to provide showers and computers since the local shelter did not have these facilities. Mobilization included the need for transporting evacuees to showers on a shift basis; collecting and distributing towels and toiletries; laundering towels, providing scores of college tee shirts for many who only had the clothes on their backs; providing computer access so evacuees could check on loved ones' whereabouts; and then the college became a distribution site for boxes of donated supplies, inventorying them, and distributing supplies to other local evacuation sites. Students, staff, and local senior citizens were the primary volunteers working at Lee. The college's athletic teams pitched in by washing towels; the college counselors were sent to hotels to provide their services to evacuees, and the college provided IT expertise as requested.

Then Baytown itself became a target for Hurricane Rita. Evacuation was ordered, and many became "double evacuees." The college itself was a designated safe shelter during the storm. Lee College was spared significant damage, but many Lee students and staff had damages or destruction at their homes and had suffered through a horrendous evacuation of frustrating highway gridlock.

For Lee, reopening included food drives, counseling groups, car pool systems, and altered fall semester schedule, and postponement of their SACS re-accreditation visit. Still a site for evacuated students from sister states, Lee handled 60 new students during its interrupted fall semester, and taught 1000 new students in adult and continuing education programs. Finally, Lee had to close its prison program as a result of the two hurricanes for the fall semester.

Lessons, Surprises, and Cautions

Dr. Ellis reported that several positive outcomes resulted from Lee's involvement in two hurricanes:

1. They discovered that the college evacuation plan worked.
2. The college had recently changed its server location to a second floor, a decision that proved essential for the maintenance of IT operations.
3. The college proved to be a good, strong hurricane shelter.
4. The local Volunteer Center was effective and useful in coordination of volunteer efforts.
5. The College's local partners, especially the police, held as significant supporters through the crisis.

Certain surprises also resulted. What had seemed a logical communication plan was made useless when cell phones did not work. Directives to the college from local, state, and federal agencies were confusing and inconsistent. And the president realized that an essential step in volunteering a campus as a disaster evacuation site should be discussed at the Board level prior to an emergency situation.

Lee College absorbed significant costs through being a volunteering campus; however, Lee College does not expect to be reimbursed for those expenses. Instead, the college proved to be a hugely generous family volunteering, time, expertise, money, and patience. Faculty continued to teach, and staff continued to work while their own homes had been damaged or destroyed.

Dr. Ellis concluded her remarks with this advice:

- **Communications:** Since cell phones were not effective and since the college off-site location for web-based communications was not located far enough away from the disaster to be out of harm's way, a college needs to consider satellite phone and off-site telephone conference bridge availability. The possibility of an IT partner at a distant community college is a good option.
- **Community Partners:** Since community colleges are usually community based, it is essential for there to be strong partnerships with local agencies like police, fire, emergency services, utility companies, cities and counties, K-12 districts, etc. Having a pre-existing cooperative relationship is crucial for the college.
- **Flexibility:** There is no time like a crisis to test the flexibility of your college. Cutting red tape and finding alternative solutions when plans don't work must happen. Lee found that the usual bid processes were not workable in an emergency. In state tuition had to be available to Texas and to Louisiana students, and 100% refunds had to be given to students displaced by the emergencies, even though neither option was available through existing policies. PELL transfers were arranged; the community provided quick, emergency scholarships. All possible means were used to get students back in school if that was their wish.
- **Preparation:** When the college becomes an evacuation site, then you will need to have emergency provisions stored on campus: water food, and gas were essential for those manning the college 24 hours per day during the hurricane emergencies. Also, emergency travel passes were required for re-entry to the campus.

The example that Lee College provided for flexible, humane response to near-by and for local emergencies gave participants many practical solutions to add to their own safety plans. Dr. Ellis' remarks were enthusiastically applauded by all.

Service Learning at Tomball College

Clark Friesen, Faculty Service Learning Coordinator at Tomball College of the North Harris Montgomery Community College District in Houston, TX, discussed the ways in which disasters in the community can become both "teachable moments" and opportunities to engage faculty/students in Service Learning projects. A speech professor at Tomball, Friesen has been an advocate for service learning for several years. He related that the North Harris District Colleges were all involved in volunteer services and providing donations to the stricken areas in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. He also indicated that the service learning coordinator needs to be included in disaster preparedness planning at colleges.

Since providing service learning options to students in courses within the curriculum is a process that takes time and planning, it is usually unreasonable to expect service learning (credit volunteer options) to be inserted within an existing semester in response to emergency volunteer needs. The question needs to be posed, however: Is the disaster compelling enough to engage additional service learning options immediately? For Katrina, the answer was “Yes.”

Service Learning became a means for nursing students to become meaningful volunteers at the Houston Astrodome hurricane evacuation site and at local shelters. Psychology, social work and counseling courses provided volunteer opportunities for students, staff and faculty.

The need to alter within a semester the projects that faculty had planned so that students could be involved in the disaster was evident. Such flexibility within the context of service learning projects would allow, and did allow, students to be involved with an emergency disaster response rather than to keep them involved in the initially planned project. Two-thirds of the service learning enrolled students turned to hurricane-related projects during fall term 05. Service learning projects resulted in hurricane preparedness plans developed for students in public schools; a mini-term student trip has been completed to provide volunteer assistance to the hurricane-damaged communities; CIS classes have aided in flood plain mapping; and plans for evacuation of animals have been devised. He noted that working relationships with community agencies, an absolute for successful service learning projects, must have been established and developed well before any emergency exists. The constant nourishment of such partnerships is an essential element in successful service learning programs at community colleges.

Information from the CCNCCE

Lyvier Conss, Executive Director of the Community College National Center for Community Engagement, updated the participants about progress among Supporting Actions for Engagement (SAFE) grant recipients. A set of “Service Learning, Homeland Security, and Disaster Preparedness Curriculum” materials were distributed and are available at the CCNCCE web site, <http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/engagement> website. Further information about the numerous curricula developed as a result of SAFE grantee work is available through calling CCNCCE at 480.461.6280. Colleges participating in SAFE grant work have included Kenai Peninsula College in Soldotna, Alaska; Gulf Coast Community College and Hillsborough Community College in Florida; Mesa Community College in the Maricopa District in Arizona; Monroe Community College in New York; Northampton Community College in Pennsylvania; Riverside Community College in California; Raritan Valley Community College in New Jersey; San Antonio College in Texas; Tohono O’odham Community College, Arizona; and the University of Puerto Rico at Cayey. Course curriculum ranges from Office Systems Concepts to Veterinary Technology to American History, all with connections to disaster preparedness within a service learning context. Ms. Conss noted that although the current SAFE grant will be completed at the conclusion of this year, she had made application for

a new grant. Those interested should check the web site for CCNCCE listed above for further information about a new grant cycle and application information.

In addition to the specific curricula mentioned above, all were given information about the Annual National Conference for the Community College National Center for Community Engagement, Mary 24-26, 2006, at the Double Tree Paradise Valley Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona. For hotel reservations, call 1.877.445.6677; registration information is available online at www.mc.maricopa.edu/engagement.

During the working lunch, a series of questions were used for table discussions.

1. Many kinds of emergencies affect our colleges. A college can never be completely prepared for any and all emergencies. However, it is likely that each college can predict the most likely emergency and do planning for that type of disaster. What is the most likely disaster that could occur at your location?
2. Do you have a safety plan? An evacuation plan? What kinds of emergencies are included within the plan? Do you rehearse college response and actions? Do you spend the most effort on the most likely disaster scenario?
3. Should a disaster of the sort that is most likely to occur at your college happen, what are the most serious issues you are likely to face?
4. What community partners are essential as you prepare for the most likely disaster? How can you or how have you developed partnerships?
5. Have you engaged service learning options for students in response to local emergencies or special needs? Describe them.

Table conversations were lively; table appointed chairs reported out the most significant parts of their shared conversations.

Delgado Story

Dr. Alex Johnson, chancellor of Delgado Community College in New Orleans, was the afternoon session speaker. Reviewing the situation at Delgado prior to the August 05 landfall of Hurricane Katrina, Dr. Johnson commented on the ways in which Delgado was becoming a Learning College. Focused upon learning, the college enrolled 17,400 credit students in nationally ranked programs, particularly in the health sciences. New facilities were complimented by a resource development emphasis called “Excellence through Opportunity.” A major marketing and public relations effort was underway; and “Workforce Training Solutions” was the means whereby the energetic college was answering the economic needs of its local community. Then came Katrina.

Photographs of Delgado underwater were shown to Summit participants. Many buildings were either destroyed or damaged by the rising water. Dr. Johnson and his family evacuated to Atlanta; students and staff were disbursed throughout the southeast and Texas. There was loss of life; there was huge loss of property, stability, and work for his students and staff members.

Dr. Johnson discussed the devastating emotional impact on his college of its plight as Fall Semester was literally cancelled. He indicated that his role as chancellor required that he set direction and tone for recovery; that he be decisive and make quick decisions; that he be demanding in the crisis yet conscientious and reassuring; that he be constantly available to all; that he be resilient; that he become the “public face” of the institution; that he become a staunch advocate for the survival of Delgado; and that he take responsibility to convey the institutional memory.

He first created a new Emergency Response Team made up of those who were essential to weather the crisis. They included the head of information technology, communications, finance, payroll, human resources, and compliance; there had to be someone who was a curriculum expert, another who was charged with the website, the person who was in charge of facilities, someone who could handle government relations. Other crucial members were the director of financial aid, the public safety director, and a proposal writer.

Following the identification of Emergency Team Headquarters and finding housing for key employees, the college went through these steps immediately or as soon as possible:

1. Determined the status of facilities and located temporary facilities.
2. Located students, and, where possible, retained them in online courses or provided them with direct instruction at remote locations or got them enrolled at other colleges.
3. Restored information technology functions, including the website, online course capability, and student and administrative systems.
4. Launched a public relations campaign so that everyone received regular status reports. Got approval to implement administrative processes that expedited reopening the college.

An important and early decision was to reopen Delgado as soon as possible. To this end, the college opened the West Bank and Covington locations in late September, locations with little damage; accelerated the instruction for nursing students, and completed their semester’s work from October 17 through January 19; provided free online courses in collaboration with the “Sloan Semester” for 2513 students; provided a free intersession between December 1-23 for 150 students; and began on November 17 registration for a fully operational Spring Semester 2006.

Delgado Community College proudly opened its doors at all sites for Spring Semester 06 with 10,008 students, 25% of which were enrolled online; 55% of Delgado employees remain employed and are back in New Orleans. The college has expanded its education and training role, aiding the local community to find trained construction workers through linkages with several technical campuses. An approved, revamped accreditation focus has resulted along with strong involvements with the local community.

As a result of Katrina, the challenges include the need to continue to recover from the loss of employees and financial resources. The college plans to continue to expand alternative approaches to instructional delivery as a means to reclaim students. It must, of course, renovate and rebuild facilities.

Dr. Johnson discussed the lessons of the experience. *An emergency response team must be identified early, and they must have laptops with wireless capabilities and cell phones with alternative area codes. An alternative site for headquarters should be identified prior to any evacuation emergency. Information technology must be secure with a documented retrieval system, portable and backup systems, distant “hot sites,” and all course syllabi and outlines need to be available electronically.*

Communications plans are always a challenge in any disaster. Partner with local and national media; provide periodic updates and press releases about policies, facilities, and programs. Electronics communications management should include websites, chat sites, and remote access to the electronic medium.

Hugely important is the need for the college to have *strong relationships with federal, state, and local agencies; with key legislators and executives; with professional organizations like accrediting agencies and AACCC, League for Innovation, ACE; and advisory bodies.*

He advises that a college create an emergency preparedness checklist that include preparations for a state of emergency, operations in a state of emergency, and immediate recovery from a state of emergency. He emphasized the need to reopen the college as quickly as possible to provide normalcy to both students and staff. And the college should provide group and individual counseling both during the emergency recovery and for a while afterwards in order to help alleviate a variety of difficult personal and interpersonal challenges. He recommended that colleges consider making use of mediation services, grief and recovery workshops, and focusing on managing traumatic stress. Having referral services available if the college cannot provide the actual service is essential.

Finally, Dr. Johnson wrote: “Before Hurricane Katrina, Delgado Community College had made significant strides as a learning-centered institution. This progress must now serve as the framework for a major shift in the “learning college” approach, one that must facilitate learning and, simultaneously, challenge us to experiment with new approaches to producing learners. There are no roadmaps for this effort, no benchmarks for a learning college affected by a natural disaster. But what we do possess is collective wisdom, creativity, and experience. And it is these attributes that will serve us steadfastly as we produce learners for a new economy.”

Following Dr. Johnson’s presentation and his answers to numerous questions, the participants worked with 7 disaster scenarios developed to test colleges’ responses to various types of disasters, whether fire, terrorist attack, irate employees, or oil spills. The scenarios themselves are available for college use in Appendix A.

