Title: Strathmore University Crisis Communication Policy

List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SU</td>
<td>Strathmore University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURO</td>
<td>Communications &amp; University Relations Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Communications Officer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administration of the Policy

This policy will be administered by the Communication and University Relations Department.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or as may be required.

Introduction:

Strathmore University’s Crisis Communications Policy outlines roles, responsibilities and protocols that will guide the university in promptly sharing information with all Strathmore stakeholders during an emergency or crisis.

In full recognition of the adverse effects which can befall the institution upon failure to properly manage any crisis, Strathmore University has put down the following guidelines to structure
communications to both internal and external stakeholders upon arise of a crisis. This is in line with the SU’s core ethical values.

The Communications & University Relations office will use multiple channels to reach as many people as possible with accurate, relevant and timely information. This is especially important before (where possible), during and in the first hours and days following the onset of a crisis. The goal is to be open, accountable, and accessible to all audiences, while being mindful of legal and privacy concerns.

For the purposes of this policy, a crisis is defined as a significant event whose impact prompts significant, often sustained news coverage and public scrutiny and has the potential to damage the institution’s reputation, image, business continuity and/or financial stability. A crisis could be precipitated by an emergency or a controversy. Emergencies can include but are not limited to: accidents, fire, terror attack, natural disaster, website & social media account hacking or other events that present a reputational threat and typically may involve response from police, fire brigade or emergency medical personnel.

Controversies describe events such as protests, cases of staff/student misconduct, and negative trending stories about the university or any other incidents that can damage the University reputation.

Pre-emptive Crisis Management

SU adopts a pre-emptive approach to media relations. This policy is based on disclosure as a preferred strategy for management of crisis.

Crisis prevention

Communications and University Relations office will maintain regular contact with University Council (UC), Management Board (MB), deans, directors, department heads, faculty, staff and student leaders, advising the appropriate administrator(s) when internal issues or developments appear likely to lead to public relations problems.
Similarly, UC, MB, deans, directors, department heads, faculty, staff and student leaders, will regularly notify the Communications and University Relations Director of internal developments that may escalate into public relations crises.

The Communications and University Relations team will monitor local, county and national news coverage of the Strathmore brand advising the appropriate administrator(s) of issues and/or trends that might lead to negative stories.

**Crisis response**

When crises erupts, the office of Communications and University Relations will gather and verify information about the crisis, assess the severity of the crisis, and develop strategies concerning how information is to be released. The Director University Relations is the only source of official communication for the institution during a crisis. Should the institution appoint another official to speak for the institution, the Communications and University Relations Director will work out logistical details of releasing information, and distribute, verify the information as quickly as possible to internal and external audiences.

**Definitions**

1.1 Communications & University Relations Office: The office under which all communication policies and strategy documents are domiciled.
1.2 The Strathmore University (SU): Refers to Strathmore University
1.3 Management Board (MB): Refers to the senior management team of SU
1.4 SU staff: Refers to members of staff working in Strathmore. Staff members can be part-time, full-time or consultants.

1.5 Social media channels: Refers to all social media channels including but not limited to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, University blog, Newsletters, personal blogs by lecturers.

1.6 Social media champions: Any staff member with the mandate to communicate on behalf of the University on any social media platform.

1.7 Communications Officer: Staff member working in the Communications and University Relations office.

1.8 SU Staff: Refers to the staff in various departments within the University.

1.9 Strathmore Students: Refers to students who are registered and currently taking courses in the University. Alumni members may sometimes fall under this category.

1.10 Strathmore’s audiences refers to undergraduates, graduates, prospective students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, trustees, neighbors, city leaders, media, the Madaraka community, national and international publics, and state officials.

Crisis Committee:

As per the University Statutes, the membership of the University Crisis Committee will comprise of the following office holders:

- Vice Chancellor
- Director of Communications & University Relations
- University Secretary
- Director of Human Resources
- Finance Director
- Director, Legal and Governance Services
- 3 Deans (depending on nature of the crisis. For crisis involving students, the Dean of Students will be in the Crisis Team)
- Admissions Director
- Students Leader (in crisis involving students)
The Vice Chancellor will be the Crisis Committee Leader (CCTL), however, he may nominate any other officer to chair the crisis meetings on his behalf.

Other members maybe co-opted into the crisis team depending on the nature of crisis and area of expertise in the subject matter of the particular crisis.

The Crisis Team should meet immediately after being summoned by the Chair of the Crisis Team.

**Relevant laws**

The execution of this policy is reliant of existing legal statutes of the country, Strathmore University Statutes and other policies within the University. It is expected that staff and students are conversant with the following relevant laws:

Staff members and students directly involved in use of media channels on behalf of the University and its departments will receive training sessions on the relevant laws by the Legal and Governance Services Office in liaison with the Communications and University Relations Office.

It is expected that all staff members and students are guided by Strathmore’s philosophy of decency and morality at all times.

**Key responsibilities in case of a crisis**

**University Deans**

1. The Dean of Students must compulsorily be a member of the crisis team in the event that the unfolding crisis affects impacts or involves students.
2. The Dean of Students must immediately inform and involve the student council members in the event that the unfolding crisis affects, impacts or involves students.
3. At the crisis management meeting, Deans will:
   - Share all available information with the crisis team.
   - Monitor unfolding events.
   - Contact parents and families where appropriate as soon as feasible.
   - Advise on the University position(s) as the crisis unfolds.
• Agree on the information to be conveyed to the university’s audiences.
• Implement their role within the crisis communication plan.

**Vice-Chancellor**

• The Vice Chancellor has the oversight responsibility during any crisis situation that affects the University.
• The office of the VC will be the liaison between the office of the Pro-chancellor and University Council in all communications about the crisis situation and progress of the same.
• In the absence of the Vice Chancellor, any of the Deputy Vice-Chancellors will assume this role.

**Communications office/ Crisis Communication team**

• Convene the Crisis Communications Team for any crisis or emergency so that there is coordinated communication to stakeholders regarding the crisis.
• Coordinate with the Vice Chancellors office in issuing official statements to various stakeholders.
• Send appropriate communication (e.g. sms/email/radio/television/social media) to students/staff, stakeholders for any incident or emergency.
• Publish official statements regarding the crisis on the university website, social media accounts and internal weekly newsletters.
• Send official press releases regarding the crisis to the media as and when appropriate.
• Create incident-specific blogs to convey information directly to particular audiences.
• Convene other communicators for emergency call center or other needs.

**Student’s Council team**

• Acting as a liaison between the University Management Board and the students in giving feedback on the feel of the ground.
IT departments – platforms

During a crisis, the Director of Communications and University Relations, and the crisis communications team will work in liaison with Information Technology Department (ITD), and specifically with a designated officer by the IT Director, to establish additional communications systems as required that effectively communicate critical messages to various audiences. The systems may include but are not limited to the following, SMS platform, hotline telephone line for handling incoming calls, voicemail service during the crisis, CRM platform for emails etc.

Management Board

- Tasking the crisis team with the responsibility of periodically reviewing the crisis response plan and running crisis response simulations from time to time.
- Early involvement of the MB is especially beneficial if the crisis involves misconduct by management or if management is compromised or conflicted, enabling the MB to take over the investigation and response at the outset. As the crisis unfolds, the MB’s representative(s) in the Crisis Team should keep other members of the MB fully informed of what is happening.
- Monitor emerging risks
- Provide a firm moral centre to the university during the crisis.
- Assess the magnitude of the crisis and take account of the damage: (property damage, costs likely to be incurred, injured persons, lost lives etc.)
- Keeping the Vice-Chancellor updated regarding the situation on the ground.
- Assessing viable outcomes of the crisis and advising the Vice-Chancellor on practical alternatives to adopt.

Heads of Administrative Units

- Coordinate to contact students, staff and other stakeholders who may be affected by the particular crisis.
• Establish a crisis help-desk in their respective units/departments/faculties/schools/centres to reply to inquiries and complaints from concerned stakeholders.
• Coordinate the assembling of any lost and found items.

**Security Team**

• Evacuation
• Set off the alarm
• Ensure safety of victims and property
• Alert local Public Authorities
• Report to the Management Board about the situation on the ground

**Involvement of University Council or Trustees in a crisis scenario**

In a crisis scenario where senior management is embroiled in the crisis, the University Council can be involved in handling the situation in liaison with the Trustees of Strathmore. The modalities of this involvement will be guided by the Office of the Pro-Chancellor or his representative.

**Releasing information Internally & Externally**

The Director of Communications and University Relations in liaison with other members of the Crisis team will prepare all holding statements after liaising with the crisis team.

The Crisis team and Management Board should give approval for holding statements to inform internal and external audience by email/sms/social media or by whatever channel that is appropriate for the audience in context of each crisis.

Approved holding statements should follow all laid down procedures such as verification, accuracy, liability, etc.

Dissemination channels will follow an inside-out model, whereby internal stakeholders are informed first, and external stakeholders follow.
Dissemination of approved information to different stakeholders will be through channels such as staff & student emails, social media channels, bulk SMS, print media, website, radio and press briefs.

**Releasing information to the Media**

Releasing of information to media is the responsibility of the Director of Communications and University Relations. This will be done after a brief from the University Crisis Team.

Dissemination of information to media can be through press interviews, press releases, telephone conversations, and website communications among others.

The Crisis Team will nominate the press interviewees after assessing the nature and extent of crisis. However, as per the General Communications Policy; the Director of Communications and University Relations is the default spokesperson of the institution.

Critical functions of the identified spokesperson for any crises may be:

a. Communicate with key stakeholders

b. Communicate with reporters,

c. Field questions from the broad community.

The official spokesperson of the University, irrespective of the communication platform is the Director of Communications. No member of staff or student is permitted, under any circumstance, to respond on behalf of any part of the Strathmore community, University management or the entire University. This applies to all communications platforms. The Director of Communications and University Relations when necessary will provide regular updates to all audiences.

**N.B**

All staff members/ students must not disclose non-public (confidential) information of the University. Any public position taken on any issue through any communication channel should be clearly stated as one’s personal view, and not representative of the University’s position in that particular issue. One should also be aware that taking such public positions might cause conflict with attendant negative ramifications to the University.