

Addressing Crisis at an Urban Community College

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Basic Situation

You and your team are all administrators and faculty at an urban community college in upstate New York. The community college is located in an eight story building in the downtown area of a major city of two million people. The community college occupies four different floors of the building, with other floors being occupied by businesses of various types. Just after noon today, there was a multi-car accident in which a car was sent through the front doors of the building that houses the college. The car entered the front of the building, traveled 25 feet, and crashed into the bank of elevators that assist individuals in accessing the college which is located at least three floors above ground level. The car that entered the front of the building was driven by a student of the college. Ten people were injured from shattered glass, and the car's impact. Of the ten injured individuals from inside the building, four of them are students of the college who were awaiting an elevator.

Institutional Context

The urban community college is a branch campus of a larger community college institution. The urban college serves 1,800 students in FTE, but there are over 3,900 students enrolled part- or full-time during this year's spring semester at the college. The students at the college are predominantly minority in ethnicity, with 62 percent of the students of African descent, 28 percent are Latino/a, and 10 percent of other ethnic backgrounds. Students at the college tend to be first generation college students, with a large population being adult students who also hold full-time jobs somewhere in the city. Due to the small number of students, and the central housing of the campus in one building, the sense of community at the campus is very strong. The college boasts solid programs in human services, criminal justice, liberal arts, and college preparation.

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The Crisis Team Context

You and your team are part of the small group of full-time administrators on campus, along with one of you being a faculty member/student advisor. Your team is responsible for academic administration (i.e. scheduling courses, grades, etc.), registration, advising, student services, and campus life. Your campus does have a crisis team, of which the members of your group are all members (i.e. your group is the crisis team). The crisis team is responsible for both policy and campus response to the crisis situation.

Your Task

Your task for this case study is to address the following issues:

1. What are the immediate needs from the perspective of your crisis response team? What actions will you take over the next 24, 48 and 72 hours?
2. What is unique about the community college context of this situation?
3. Is this a crisis? Or is this some other type of event?
4. What are the major leadership responsibilities of this situation? What are the management responsibilities?
5. Is there an identified process that you will follow in this situation (i.e. a crisis response plan)?
6. What type of leadership approach or theory will you use to guide your actions in response to this situation?

Update One

You have just been informed that one of those injured in the accident has died of his/her injuries. The individual who passed away was a student at the college for the past three semesters, and was highly involved in student life.

1. Does this change your response plan?
2. How will you respond to this new development?
3. What is needed now from leadership, which may or may not have been needed before?