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Apr07

[Bob](#)

[The importance of crisis communications: Duke case study](#)

March Madness has a new meaning at Duke University.

The heavily favored [Blue Devils](#) exited the NCAA Basketball tournament early with a loss to LSU. Duke fans were in mourning.

But this pales in comparison to the turmoil the [University](#) finds itself in today with allegations that members of the lacrosse team sexually assaulted a woman at an off-campus party. Duke now finds itself in the middle of a national media [firestorm](#). Sex, alcohol, race, elite school vs. state school....are all apart of the story lines.

Some argue that Duke is not doing [enough](#).

Time will tell how this story plays out. But for now the Duke PR team has its hands full. How they handle the crisis communications will go a long way in determining the overall impact to Duke's reputation. From a distance, it appears the Duke communications team is doing all the right things, given the circumstances. Check out their [website](#), and you will find it saturated with information about the lacrosse controversy. This includes a letter from the president, an entire "showcase" area on news related to the incident, FAQs and more.

In times of crisis, the PR team plays a key role. It is imperative that the team present truthful and timely information to the campus community and beyond. To me, it looks like the Duke news team has everything in order....and this story will not be going away any time soon!

In 2005, RIT's University News team earned a national [CASE](#) award and a Public Relations Society of America [award](#) for its crisis management of the Crossroads shooting.

The magnitude of the Duke case is certainly more enormous. The Duke communications team has plenty of work left....It's a live case study that we will be monitoring.... as well as learning from....Because at some point and time, RIT, or any organization, will be involved in some form of crisis communications. It's inevitable. So be prepared.

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1. [Mike Saffran](#)
Apr07

You're right on the mark, Bob, especially regarding the need to "present truthful and timely information to the campus community and beyond." In other words, don't stonewall. That's one of the key points emphasized in a crisis communication segment of a higher-ed PR conference that I attended a couple years ago: Be open, honest and prepared to admit mistakes (people are willing to forgive if you acknowledge your errors). Another term we sometimes use: transparency.

2. [Justin](#)
Apr10

What do you think about blogs as a tool for crisis management? Maybe not with in the higher ed world, but I know in corporate world, when you get a response to a problem it usually seems very canned and not to the point. It is like the text had to be checked by legal, marketing, and management teams before the public gets it. All of the text that actually says anything gets stripped out. Good blogs are open, truthful, timely, honest, and very transparent. If you read Robert Scoble and Shel Israel's book Naked Conversations, they give stories of many different problems that were dealt with via blogs.

3. [Jonathan Bernst](#)
Apr19

You're absolutely right about blogs being an increasingly useful tool for crisis management. I've been using blogs for multiple clients in the past year, to great effect. Jonathan Bernstein President Bernstein Crisis Management, Inc.
<http://www.bernsteincrisismanagement.com>

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The Tiger Beat takes you behind the scenes with the members of [RIT University News](#)—the news and public relations division of [Rochester Institute of Technology](#). Get the "story behind the story" and an insider's look at who we are and what we do to publicize RIT news.

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