UNIVERSITIES IN CRISIS: HOW CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS AFFECT MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The Pennsylvania State University was rocked to its core on November 5, 2011, when the allegations against former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky began to saturate virtually every news media outlet in the country. The coverage was extensive—what seemed like 24-hour news streaming of the scandal consumed Facebook and Twitter newsfeeds as well as countless television and radio news broadcasts for weeks after the grand jury presentment was released. State College was placed under the world’s microscope almost overnight, abruptly transforming “Happy Valley” into a somber place.

The university was tasked with performing crisis communications management in order to preserve its brand image in the eyes of its publics. However, the school’s communications efforts were lacking on many levels, and, therefore, its image suffered. Through a case study approach, this thesis explores what effective crisis communications management looks like within the collegiate sphere. This document then discusses why the Sandusky scandal was the perfect media storm and investigates how Penn State’s crisis communications implicated its marketing activities moving forward. The research concludes with recommendations for handling future crises.
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Chapter 1

Theories of Handling Crisis Communications Management

Today, public perceptions are becoming more closely tied to organizational reputations than at any other time in recent history. Consequently, organizations find themselves under the microscope of their publics and, therefore, face increased pressure to perform flawlessly. This not only means generating profits in the corporate world or recruiting and developing top students at the university level, but doing so ethically, sustainably, and uniquely. Ultimately, organizations must operate in ways that cultivate favorable public perceptions in order to achieve long-term success.

Such activity requires organizations to constantly protect their reputations, which have been carefully developed over time. When an organization encounters problems that endanger its reputation, immediate action is necessary to control negative press and shape public perceptions in a way that will sustain public support for the organization. When crises occur, organizations are compelled to communicate with various audiences. Quality communication is imperative for the success of the organization because careless communication could easily plague an organization out of existence. Effective communication during tough times can transform potential disasters into positive situations for an organization. In other words, organizations must practice crisis communications management.
Crisis Defined

Researchers, practitioners, and consultants have offered many different definitions of the word crisis in the context of crisis communications. However, while the descriptions may vary, some characteristics remain relatively constant:

- Atypical event that might be predictable, but not expected when it occurs
- Escalates in intensity
- Demands quick response
- Threatens the organization’s reputation
- Disrupts the organization’s routine activities
- Creates uncertainty, anxiety, and stress within and outside the organization
- Challenges the organization’s human, physical, and financial resources
- Attracts attention from the media and other outside audiences
- Compels the organization to communicate with various audiences
- Alters the organization permanently

(Millard and Smith 2002, Zaremba 2010)

Considering these elements, this thesis will define a crisis as the following: A significant disruption of an organization’s normal activities that stimulates extensive media coverage and public scrutiny (Millard and Smith 2002).

When a Problem Becomes a Crisis

All organizations experience problems on a daily basis. Entities outside of the organization may learn about such a problem after its occurrence. The media may report on it or the government may conduct an investigation, but the issue has been resolved and is not ongoing. According to Millard and Smith, a problem becomes a crisis when “it escapes the organization before managers and employees can control it.” At this point, stakeholders important to the
organization want to understand the underlying forces of the crisis because “each feels a sense of shock, anger, surprise, empathy, suspicion or sympathy” for those affected by the event (Millar and Smith 2002). Therefore, people within the organization must communicate effectively and efficiently with its publics before, during, and after a crisis.

**Common Types of Crises**

Crises that eventually go public generally fall into one of two categories, depending on the amount of warning time. These categories include sudden crises and smoldering crises. A sudden crisis is described as “a disruption in the organization’s normal routine, and occurs with little or no warning, generating extensive news coverage and public scrutiny” (Millar and Smith 2002). Therefore, sudden crises leave little time for an organization to prepare and respond. A smoldering crisis is defined as the following: “A condition that is potentially damaging and of which someone in the organization has knowledge but does nothing. The condition smolders like an ember in the fireplace until some change in the condition brings the ember to a flame.” Smoldering crises give an organization more time to prepare and respond. Typically, people envision sudden crises when thinking about crisis communications management. However, smoldering crises have proven to be far more prevalent (Millar and Smith 2002).

**Myths about Crisis Communications Management**

Misconceptions about crisis communications are problematic not only because they are logically flawed, but also because they form the foundations for inaccurate communications platforms during times of crisis. Consequently, inept communications tactics become part of the crisis itself, compounding the original problem. In fact, researchers and practitioners have found that audiences remember less about the actual crisis event and more about how the organization responded to the event (Zaremba 2010). Since ineffective crisis communications management may be based on fallacies, it is vital to understand common myths surrounding this branch of
damage control. Please consider the following five myths concerning crisis communications management:

1. **Most crises are sudden. They occur without warning.**

   According to the Institute for Crisis Management’s Annual Crisis Report of 2011, 61 percent of organizational crises fall into the smoldering category (Institute for Crisis Management 2012). Most crises resulting from personnel actions have a history within an organization. In other words, the conditions have existed for some time, have been known by someone, and may have been reported to supervisors who did nothing to correct the problem or prevent a crisis (Millar and Smith 2002). Therefore, most crises sit dormant for a period of time and then erupt, giving the organization some prior warning about the event.

   ![Figure 1-1: Sudden v. Smoldering Crises](source: Institute for Crisis Management)

2. **Crisis communication is solely a reactive activity.**

   Assuming that crisis communications management only involves responding to a crisis ignores the notion that a successful crisis communicator can prepare for, and...
sometimes preempt, a crisis with proactive planning (Zaremba 2010). Preparatory
actions can help an organization take control of a crisis and mitigate reputational damage.

3. **Dealing with the media is the primary activity of crisis communications.**

   While the mass media—television, radio, newspapers, magazines, Internet—are
important to crisis communications, they are not the only audiences. In fact, they might
not even be the primary audiences. Assuming that crisis communications management is
synonymous with media relations means an organization will inevitably ignore other key
audiences. Also, synonymously relating crisis communications with media relations
could cause an organization to assume that a crisis does not exist unless the media are
involved (Zaremba 2010).

   Note that the media cannot be ignored because these channels can assist in crisis
communications efforts. The media can instantly disseminate influential messages to
mass audiences, helping crisis communicators shape public perceptions and control the
危机.

4. **The job of crisis communicators is to spin a negative situation into a positive one.**

   “Spinning” has become a metaphor for transforming a reality into a more
acceptable and attractive situation. Crisis communicators avoid spinning because it
disorients an organization, making it difficult to perceive the crisis and the role of
communication during such an event (Zaremba 2010). Open, honest, and timely
communication is most effective during a crisis. This tactic will keep an organization
accountable to its publics, and, therefore, will strengthen public trust and create favorable
perceptions during tough times.

5. **Crisis communication is a linear activity.**

   A common misconception about communication is that information travels one
way—from sender to receiver. The journey of a message does not end once it has been
generated. According to Zaremba, “what settles as a message received is a function of a nonlinear process of reaction to the original message and ongoing interaction.” Today’s back-and-forth communication is heavily driven by communications technology and the Internet. Such two-way dialogue affects what an organization’s stakeholders internalize during a crisis (Zaremba 2010).

Figure 1-2: The Communications Process

![Communications Process Diagram]

Source: www.media-studies.ca

Crisis Communications Principles

When communicating in the midst of chaos, an organization should integrate the following three principles into a crisis communications plan. These principles are universal to all crises, no matter what the event. Executing these steps can smooth the communications process and obstruct additional reputational damage.

1. Establish legitimate sources of information.

   Given today’s communication technology developments, mainly the Internet and social media outlets, media consumers obtain information from hundreds of different sources on a daily basis. This trend can turn dangerous during times of crisis. According to Keri Stephens, assistant professor of communication studies at The University of Texas at Austin, “If an organization involved in the crisis doesn’t provide information quickly and clearly, the public will turn to third-party sources to fill the vacuum—and
that information may not be accurate […] Emotions are high during a crisis and people find comfort in information—regardless of the quality of that information” (The University of Texas at Austin 2009). Therefore, it is vital for an organization to establish legitimate sources of information for its publics to turn to for answers. Such sources can take many different forms, including a spokesperson, communications team, website, or a combination of these options.

A spokesperson is an effective source of information as it provides an organization’s publics with someone to relate to on a human level during a predicament. Today, spokespersons do not only field media questions and deliver news to the public. A new standard exists for a spokesperson to successfully communicate messages during a crisis. According to Millar and Smith, this success comes down to six actions:

1. Be visible
2. Speak shortly after the event
3. Speak to constituents
4. Provide useful information
5. Express sympathy
6. Provide a positive perspective

(Millar and Smith 2002)

Spokespersons should prepare thoroughly for every public appearance by performing an audience analysis, choosing an appropriate speaking style, and structuring messages effectively (Zaremba 2010).

2. **Tell your story first.**

   Preferably, the organization’s spokesperson should be the first to utter words describing the story of the crisis. Realistically, this seldom happens as the media often release the first bits of information to the public. Then people associated with the
organization start speculating the reasons for the crisis and share these guesses over the Internet. As more people learn about a crisis, rumors spread and the organization loses control of the story. This excerpt from Millar and Smith’s *Crisis Communications Management: How to Gain and Maintain Control* (2002) explains the importance of an organization getting in front of its story:

“Recall the events of September 11, 2001. Confusion reigned after the first plane hit the New York World Trade Center tower. The first reports tried to make sense of the situation: how could this happen, a commercial airliner crashing into one of the world’s tallest buildings? The event quickly made sense when the second plane hit and the events were clearly no accident. Then random bits of information began to fall into place as the stories unfolded before our eyes.

“In making sense, the first thought which organizes the random bits of information is the most powerful; that is, it has the greatest effect on how subsequent bits of information will be interpreted […] the first words describing a crisis tend to organize the limited information available and direct how subsequent information will contribute to the story” (Millar and Smith 2002, 51-52).

In the case of a crisis, an organization should activate its crisis plan as quickly as possible in order to begin shaping the story. If activation is delayed, all of the organization’s publics, including the media, will begin to speculate in order to make sense of the circumstances. These audiences will begin to place blame on the organization, especially if neglect is demonstrated. According to Millar and Smith, “the sooner you begin to shape the story, the more quickly you’ll be able to take control of the direction of any media or other stories about the crisis” (Millar and Smith 2002).

President George W. Bush addressed the United States in regard to the World Trade Center attacks at 9:31 a.m. on September 11, 2001, just 28 minutes after the second tower was hit (September 11 Timeline 2012).

3. **Prepare to use and be used by the media.**

This tip from Millar and Smith is vital in today’s 24-hour news cycle. As discussed in the last principle, the media will most likely catch word of an organization’s
crisis before an action plan can be implemented. Therefore, it is important for an organization to communicate with the media so the crisis story can be told in the words of the organization. The following excerpt explains the significance of this relationship:

“Ultimately, your success in managing the crisis will be determined by how well you manage the media coverage of the crisis—how the story is told. This doesn’t mean press censorship or restriction. It’s about providing the media with what they need to get their job done, but on your terms. You need the media to rapidly reach audiences important to your organization” (Millar and Smith 2002, 49).

In preparing to be used by the media, an organization should avoid the following responses being reported in the news: “no comment,” “didn’t return phone calls,” “declined to be interviewed,” “was unavailable,” etc. The common thinking is that these responses can save an organization from incriminating itself. However, the opposite is actually true. Such responses cause the public to perceive an organization to be hiding something, or, in other words, to be guilty of the accusations (Millar and Smith 2002).

Therefore, an organization should work to keep the media informed about developments in the crisis in order to gain credibility with its publics.

These three principles, along with supporting information included in this entire chapter, will be used to assess the effectiveness of university responses in the following case study of crisis communications management at the post-secondary higher education level. The study examines five cases, each of which are separated into their own chapters, that offer valuable lessons when dealing with crisis communications management at higher education institutions.
Chapter 2

The Pennsylvania State University Shooting (1996)

Background:

The morning of September 17, 1996, began as a normal fall day at the University Park campus in State College, Pennsylvania. Hundreds of students were bustling to classes under a dreary sky, many of them crossing the lawn behind the Hetzel Union Building (HUB), the main facility for student activities. The HUB’s central location puts it in close proximity to major classroom buildings on campus and serves as a common meeting spot for student organizations and study groups. The HUB lawn is a popular recreational area known for its concerts, Frisbee throwers, and sunbathers. Considering the multifaceted purposes this facility serves, hundreds of students are in and around the HUB at any given time of the day.

Crisis:

At about 9:35 a.m., Jillian Robbins, a State College resident who was 19 years old at the time, strategically positioned herself behind a cluster of bushes on the HUB lawn and targeted random passersby through the telescopic sight of a high-powered rifle. According to an article from the Philadelphia Inquirer, one of Robbins’ five bullets traveled 138 feet to kill Melanie Spalla, 19, a communications major from Altoona, Pennsylvania. Another shot wounded Nicholas Mensah, who was 22 years old. Terrified, students and faculty in the area scattered in the rain to protect themselves from the sniper. Most sought refuge in nearby Henderson Building (Eshleman, Heidorn, and Vigoda 1996).

Senior Brendon Malovrh, who was 21 years old, tackled Robbins before she could finish reloading the German-made 7mm. bolt-action Mauser. Robbins attempted to stab Malovrh with a
knife, but stabbed herself in the leg instead. Shortly after, Robbins was arrested and treated at the Centre Community Hospital, now known as the Mount Nittany Medical Center (Eshleman et al. 1996). After pleading guilty to third-degree murder, Robbins was sentenced to serve a 30- to 60-year sentence at the Muncy State Correctional Institution in 1998 (Gibb 2003). The attack lasted not much longer than a minute, but as a 1996 press release from Penn State’s Office of Public Information states: “In that short time, the sniper had managed to shatter the lives of many and the sense of security on the University Park campus” (Mountz and Rosellini 1996).

**Response:**

Upon the event, an announcement was made over the public address system in the HUB to inform students and faculty in the area of the attack happening on the lawn outside the building (Eshleman et al. 1996). Staff from Penn State’s Center for Counseling and Psychological Services quickly deployed to various locations on campus to help students cope with the trauma (Mountz and Rosellini 1996).

In the hours following the incident, former President Graham Spanier took several steps to reassure parents, students, faculty, staff, and the community at large that this random act of violence was an anomaly. These steps included timely press conferences and Spanier’s administration handling thousands of calls from parents phoning the university to ensure their children’s safety. According to the same 1996 press release, much of the correspondence sent to Spanier and other administrators in the wake of the shooting commends the university for its “quick action, candid responses to media queries and its handling of the incident.” The release also says that Spanier, who was the focus of a live call-in show on WPSX-TV the same day as the shooting, was praised for his leadership in the aftermath of the tragedy (Mountz and Rosellini 1996).
Crisis Communications Analysis:

The shooting on the University Park campus in 1996 is classified as a sudden crisis. The university received no prior warning about the event, and, therefore, had little preparation time to respond to the crisis. Consequently, the administration was forced to answer to its publics in a rapid manner in order to control the situation.

Penn State established legitimate sources of information by utilizing available forms of communications technology to inform students, parents, and the surrounding community of the attack that occurred on the HUB lawn. Since this crisis occurred during the pre-social media age, the university had time to draft its reports without the worry of news leaks. In 1996, owning a cell phone or smart phone was not nearly as common as it is today. Therefore, Internet access was mostly restricted to desktop computers. Considering the technology at hand in 1996, the public’s main source of information was the university itself. Penn State administration effectively channeled the information flow directly from the university out to its key audiences by crafting timely press releases about developments in the crisis. Media outlets used these releases to organize news stories and broadcasts about the attack. Therefore, Penn State kept control of the event by telling its story first.

Graham Spanier served as the main spokesperson during the crisis. His visibility and prompt statements provided a positive perspective for the university’s key audiences as they grappled with the tragedy. Overall, the university deserved to be commended for its successful handling of the crisis.
Chapter 3
The Virginia Tech Massacre (2007)

Background:

During his time at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), former student Seung-Hui Cho developed a history of peculiar behavior expressed through his participation in classes and interactions with other students. As an English major, Cho’s violent writing was concerning to professors. Cho was dismissed from a poetry class in the fall of 2005 because of his enraged writing and strange habit of taking pictures of classmates without their permission (Governor of Virginia 2007).

Bizarre behavioral patterns continued during the same semester. Cho inappropriately contacted two female students via the Internet, phone calls, and in person. After Virginia Tech police instructed Cho to stop, a student received a message from Cho stating, “I might as well kill myself now.” From this, a community service official reported that Cho was “an imminent threat to himself or others” (Cloud 2007). A magistrate issued a temporary detention order, which landed Cho in Carilion St. Albans psychiatric hospital for a mental evaluation in December of 2005 (Governor of Virginia 2007).

In the spring of 2006, Cho wrote a paper for his creative writing class about a young man who hates the students at his school and plans to kill them and himself. Professor Lisa Norris, Cho’s writing professor, warned Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences Mary Ann Lewis about Cho’s disturbing behavior. The dean found “no mention of mental health issues or police reports” on Cho, so Professor Norris encouraged Cho to participate in counseling. Cho declined (“How the Virginia Tech Shootings Unfolded” 2007).
Crisis:

Starting at 7:15 a.m. on April 16, 2007, Cho opened fire and killed two students in West Ambler Johnston Hall, a dormitory on campus in Blacksburg, Virginia. Virginia Tech police and the Virginia Tech Rescue Squad arrived and immediately secured the hall, asking students to stay inside their rooms. During the preliminary stages of investigation, the shooting was thought to be domestic, or between individuals that knew each other, and isolated to the dormitory (Hauser 2007).

Virginia Tech police were notified about a second shooting on campus at 9:45 a.m., this time at Norris Hall, a building that contains classrooms, laboratories, and faculty offices. Upon arrival of both Virginia Tech and Blacksburg police forces, officers found that the doors were barricaded. Within a minute, police broke through the doors, which were chained shut from the inside. According to the Washington Post, officers heard gunshots once they were inside the building. The policemen followed the sounds to the second floor, but when they reached the top of the stairs, the gunshots subsided. The police forces discovered the gunman, Cho, had taken his own life. Cho killed a total of 32, of which most were students, before committing suicide (Heron, Hsu, and Karklis 2007).

Response:

At approximately 8:25 a.m., The Virginia Tech Leadership Team, which includes the university president, executive vice president, and provost, began assessing the attack at West Ambler Johnston Hall to determine a means of notifying students of the homicides. Students and faculty were notified of the homicide investigation by an email that read:

“Subject: Shooting on campus

A shooting incident occurred at West Ambler Johnston earlier this morning.

Police are on the scene and investigating.”
The university community is urged to be cautious and are asked to contact Virginia Tech Police if you observe anything suspicious or with information on the case.

[...] We will post as soon as we have more information” (Heron et al. 2007).

A recorded message was then placed on the Virginia Tech Emergency/Weather Line and a telephone message was sent to campus phones. Also, a news release was posted on Virginia Tech’s official website (Heron et al. 2007). This initial communication that warned the Virginia Tech community of the attack occurred at approximately 9:26 a.m., more than two hours after the first shootings and more than an hour after classes began on campus at 8:00 a.m.

Another email was sent to students and faculty at 9:50 a.m. reporting that the gunman was loose on campus. Then at 10:16 a.m., faculty and students received another email notifying them that classes were canceled. The email urged its recipients to remain indoors and away from windows. Finally, at 10:52 a.m., the Virginia Tech community was notified of the second shooting with the following email:

“Subject: Second Shooting Reported; Police have one gunman in custody

In addition to an earlier shooting today in West Ambler Johnston, there has been a multiple shooting with multiple victims in Norris Hall.

Police and EMS are on the scene.

Police have one shooter in custody and as part of routine police procedure, they continue to search for a second shooter. All people in university buildings are required to stay inside until further notice.

All entrances to campus are closed” (Heron et al. 2007).

Crisis Communications Analysis:

The crisis category to which the Virginia Tech Massacre belongs to is debatable. Cho did provide some warning signs of potentially destructive behavior through classroom performance and contact with other students. Since some individuals within the university were aware of the
signals, the event could theoretically be described as a smoldering crisis. However, it is absurd to expect the administration at Virginia Tech to have anticipated the maniacal extent of Cho’s rampage. Therefore, this thesis will consider the tragedy to be a sudden crisis.

Given the nature of the crisis, the university was faced with limited time to respond. This worked against prompt communications as university administrators were charged with gathering facts, locating the gunman, and securing the campus as quickly as possible—daunting tasks to complete in a small window of time. Also, the event occurred during the early morning, the first incident happening before classes began and the second an hour and 26 minutes afterward. This inhibited timely communication of information because university faculty, including The Virginia Tech Leadership Team, were just arriving to campus.

However, even considering the factors preventing timely dissemination of information, Virginia Tech still failed to notify the campus about the attacks in a prompt manner. More than two hours had passed since the first shooting before the first email was sent. Such inaction is unacceptable. An initial message should have been sent immediately after the administration was informed about the first attack to warn the campus and surrounding community about the loose gunman. According to a letter the Department of Education wrote to the school, the notification that was eventually sent was insufficient because it did not indicate that the gunman was still at large or that a murder had been committed. The slow response may have resulted in more victims. “Had an appropriate timely warning been sent earlier to the campus community, more individuals could have acted on the information and made decisions about their own safety,” the letter states. The Department of Education attempted to fine Virginia Tech $55,000 for violating the Clery Act, which requires schools to issue timely warnings of threats on campus (The U.S. Department of Education 2011). However, the department’s chief administrative judge, Ernest C. Canellos, later found that the university did not violate the law and overturned the fine in March 2012 (Simon 2012).
While Virginia Tech established legitimate sources of information via emails, phone messages, and the Web, its biggest failure was to tell its story first. However, in this case, the story needed to be told to internal audiences (students, faculty, staff, etc.) rather than external audiences (mass media) in a more prompt manner. More immediate communication could have possibly prevented a second shooting and further contained the crisis.
Chapter 4

The Syracuse University Sex Abuse Scandal (2011)

Background:

Bernie Fine served as an assistant men’s basketball coach at Syracuse University for 35 years starting in 1976. During his time at the university, Fine acted as a mentor for neighborhood children who had basketball dreams, one of those children being Bobby Davis. Davis was a ball boy for the Syracuse men’s basketball team during the 1980s and 1990s (CNN Wire Staff 2011). Davis also babysat the Fine children, vacationed with the family, and spent a considerable amount of time at the Fine household during his childhood. Davis, now 39, alleges that when he was in the seventh grade, Fine began touching him inappropriately when Davis would spend the night in the family’s basement bedroom. This incident allegedly turned into a consistent pattern of abuse and molestation that lasted until Davis was 27 (Fish and McManus 2011).

Davis started telling his story in 2001. Since the statute of limitations had run out, the Syracuse Police Department said nothing could be done unless Davis had any knowledge of more recent allegations against Fine. In 2002, the local Syracuse newspaper and ESPN’s “Outside the Lines” both decided not to run the story because no one corroborated it. In 2005, Davis brought his case to Syracuse University, who investigated, but found no validation. But in light of sexual abuse allegations against former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky (described in Chapter 6), Davis spoke out again (Fish and McManus 2011).

Crisis:

On November 17, 2011, Davis and his stepbrother and fellow former ball boy Mike Lang, who was also allegedly molested by Bernie Fine, appeared on ESPN and publicly accused
the coach of inappropriately touching their genital areas at various locations including university basketball facilities as well as the Fine residence. This abuse occurred while Davis and Lang were ball boys for the Syracuse men’s basketball team. In consideration of these allegations, Bernie Fine was placed on administrative leave by Syracuse University on the same day as the ESPN broadcast (CNN Wire Staff 2011).

On November 27, 2011, a recording of a 2002 telephone conversation between Davis and Laurie Fine, Bernie Fine’s wife, was made public by the Syracuse-based Post-Standard newspaper and ESPN. In the recording, the woman that ESPN, citing an independent audio analyst, identified as Laurie Fine tells Davis she “knew everything that went on” with her husband. The following quotes by Laurie Fine from ESPN’s “Outside the Lines,” an Emmy Award-winning investigative series, show her knowledge of the abuse:

“Bernie has issues, maybe that he’s not aware of, but he has issues...and you [Bobby Davis] trusted somebody [Bernie Fine] you shouldn’t have trusted.

“Bernie is also in denial. I think that he did the things he did, but he somehow, through his own mental telepathy, has erased them out of his mind.

“It’s just wrong, and you were a kid” (Berko and Schwarz 2011).

Response:

A statement announcing Bernie Fine’s termination was released by Syracuse University on the evening of Sunday, November 27, 2011. The statement read: “At the direction of Chancellor Cantor, Bernie Fine’s employment with Syracuse University has been terminated, effective immediately” (Rosenberg 2011).

Head men’s basketball coach Jim Boeheim lashed out at the two accusers when the first allegations against Fine surfaced. Without any type of certainty, Boeheim accused the stepbrothers of lying and said they were out for money. Boeheim later apologized for his comments, saying he was “very shocked” about the accusations of his close friend. The head coach also admitted that he “never witnessed any of the activities that had been alleged”
Therefore, Boeheim could not verify if Fine was a pedophile or not. The case was dropped in November 2012 because not enough evidence existed to move forward with prosecution (Brooks 2012). No charges were filed against Laurie Fine, however, she filed six libel claims against ESPN, one of which was tossed out by U.S. District Judge Lawrence Kahn in February 2013 (O’Brien 2013).

**Crisis Communications Analysis:**

Considering prior investigations and several years old accusations, the crisis involving Syracuse University is categorized as a smoldering crisis. However, because no charges resulted from the investigations, no proactive planning was done to prepare for the public scrutiny that was brought by Davis and Lang’s appearance on ESPN.

Responses from the university mainly came from two different people: Chancellor Cantor and Coach Boeheim. Cantor made and disseminated statements in a controlled, authoritative manner while Boeheim’s responses were more erratic in nature. Boeheim’s bold statements supporting his friend appeared to be protecting Fine and potentially covering up his alleged actions. Overall, Boeheim’s statements added to the crisis, causing him to perform damage control later with apologies for previous statements.

Cantor crafted her statements with purpose, carefully choosing words to get her points across. She publicly distanced the university from both Fine and Boeheim by taking control and terminating the assistant basketball coach. This control is illustrated by the first six words of Fine’s termination letter: “At the direction of Chancellor Cantor […].” On the same day as Fine’s termination, Cantor also sent a message to students, faculty, staff, and alumni with updates on the situation and the actions that were taken to “ensure that Syracuse University remains a safe place […].” (Syracuse University News Services 2011).

The university could have saved itself much reputational damage by streamlining its information sources. Designating Cantor as the sole spokesperson could have prevented Boeheim
from reacting brashly and worsening the situation. Overall, Cantor acted to communicate with her constituents and to provide a positive perspective for the university’s audiences.
Chapter 5

The University of North Carolina Academic Fraud Scandal (2010-2012)

Background:

Suspicions of favorable academic treatment toward student-athletes at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) were uncovered with an internal review in June 2010. The university and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) began the investigation related to information that indicated several football players had received impermissible benefits from professional agents. In that investigation, UNC discovered and self-reported academic issues involving football players and a former student-tutor to the NCAA in August 2010 (Barnes 2010).

In November 2010, the NCAA ruled student football player Michael McAdoo permanently ineligible to play because of academic misconduct as well as improper contact with professional agents (Summers 2010). In an attempt to gain reinstatement to the team, McAdoo filed a lawsuit against the university and the NCAA in July 2011. According to UNC’s internal investigation, attached to the complaint was a paper with a cover page that indicated the paper had been submitted for a Swahili 403 class that was instructed by Professor Julius Nyang’oro. Nyang’oro served as the chair of the African and Afro-American (AFRI/AFAM) Studies Department at the time. Within a week’s time, the media reported several instances of plagiarism within the publicly available paper (Andrews and Hartlyn 2012).

An internal working group composed of faculty members was formed to further assess the situation. The group, focusing on student-athletes who had taken multiple courses within the AFRI/AFAM Studies Department, reviewed relevant documents, including records of student
course work. Serious academic anomalies were identified, at which Karen Gil, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, launched a thorough investigation in September 2011. The investigation included a comprehensive review of all courses within the AFRI/AFAM Studies Department that were taught between summer 2007 and summer 2011 (Andrews and Hartlyn 2012).

**Crisis:**

In May 2012, the investigation’s findings were compiled into a report and revealed a severe lapse in academic standards within UNC-CH’s AFRI/AFAM Studies Department. The 9-month internal investigation discovered unauthorized grades, forged signatures, and teaching irregularities in 54 courses offered over the 4-year time frame (Andrews and Hartlyn 2012).

Investigative findings by the university also showed that Julius Nyang’oro and his department manager, Deborah Crowder, appeared to have created lecture-style courses that involved no class meetings and minimal reading assignments. Near the end of each course, students were only required to submit one term paper, which they wrote with extensive help from tutors. These courses, known as “paper classes,” were allegedly used to keep student-athletes eligible to play by inflating their grade point averages (Curliss and Kane 2012).

A report prepared by former North Carolina Governor Jim Martin released in December 2012 proposes that academic anomalies can be traced as far back as 1997 and are mainly isolated to the AFRI/AFAM Studies Department, Julius Nyang’oro, and Deborah Crowder. The report found no evidence to support collusion between the athletic department and professors to provide easy classes for student-athletes (Kane 2012).

When the news broke, UNC suffered severe reputational damage as an entire university. The institution heard a loud outcry from its own faculty, many concerned about the erosion of the institutional integrity in the public’s eye. Given the circumstances, academic misconduct could have potentially been a systemic problem pervading the entire university. UNC-CH faculty
within the AFRI/AFAM Studies Department as well as other academic departments faced scrutiny for classroom conduct and grading processes.

Response:

In response to allegations of academic fraud, UNC-CH faculty members organized informal meetings to discuss the future of athletics at the university. In February 2012, the faculty group released a statement of three principles that the athletic department should reflect in order to maintain academic integrity (Summers 2012). These principles include institutional openness, educational responsibility, and mission consistency (UNC Faculty and Staff 2012). The statement was endorsed by 112 faculty members, which accounts for 6 percent of the total faculty employed at Chapel Hill (Common Data Set 2012).

Also in February 2012, the university hosted a panel to discuss college athletics and UNC’s academic mission. Sitting on the panel were Bill Friday, former president of the UNC System; Taylor Branch, a Pulitzer Price winning author for his article “The Shame of College Sports” in The Atlantic; and Chris Clotfelter, Duke professor and author of “Big-Time Sports in American Universities.” The panelists discussed athletics being treated as an extension of academics in order to keep straight the priorities of higher education. Branch expressed the importance of this with the following comment:

“If you are a regular student and your diploma is cheapened or threatened by scandals and the public perception that your university is cheating and that academics don’t work well, you are directly implicated in that. But I think also more fundamentally that as a fellow student, you’re involved in the equity of the whole enterprise of the school” (Hartness 2012).

Throughout the crisis, UNC-CH Chancellor Holden Thorp had become sort of an icon for damage control at the university. On September 16, 2012, Thorp, who had presided over UNC-CH since 2008, announced he would step down from his position at the end of the 2012-2013 academic year with the following statement:
"I will always do what is best for this University. This wasn't an easy decision personally. But when I thought about the University and how important it's been to me, to North Carolinians and to hundreds of thousands of alumni, my answer became clear.

"Over the last two years, we have identified a number of areas that need improvement. We have a good start on reforms that are important for the future of this University. I have pledged that we will be a better university, and I am 100% confident in that. We still have work to do, and I intend to be fully engaged in that until the day I walk out of this office” (Auerbach 2012).

UNC has also launched an academic review website (academicreview.unc.edu) where updates and information on the scandal are posted in order to increase transparency between the university, its community, and the public.

**Crisis Communications Analysis:**

The academic fraud crisis at UNC-CH stemmed from an internal problem that the university was already taking action to solve. Throughout the entire investigative process, the university was extremely transparent about its findings by self-reporting academic issues to the NCAA and publicly publishing investigative reports. While open and honest communication is key during a crisis, the media took hold of the available information and went viral with it. Therefore, the situation slipped out of UNC’s control. The university should have fostered more of a dialogue with the media in order to shape news stories according to its own terms.

Holden Thorp was right in his decision to step down as chancellor of UNC-CH. Considering that he had become publicly associated with negative aspects of fraud at the university, it was in UNC’s best interest for him to disconnect himself with the school. Now, the chancellor to replace Thorp should work to be viewed as a positive icon for UNC, representing hope and repair instead of damage control. Ultimately, this will create a space for the public to rally behind the school as it works to improve academic standards across the entire university.

UNC utilized communications technology in the form of its academic review website to provide transparent two-way dialogue with key audiences. This resource serves as a legitimate
source of information that the public can turn to for answers to questions. Easy access to information about developments in the case helped reinstate a sense of trust in the institution.
Chapter 6

The Pennsylvania State University Sandusky Scandal (2011-2012)

Background:

On June 22, 2012, Jerry Sandusky, a former defensive coordinator for the Penn State football team, was found guilty on 45 of 48 counts of child sexual abuse and convicted of sexually assaulting 10 boys over a period of 15 years (Chappell 2012). All of his victims participated in the Second Mile, a non-profit organization Sandusky founded in 1977 for underprivileged children. Sandusky befriended all of his victims through this program and used his access to the prominent Penn State football program to bond with the boys. Sandusky repeatedly violated his victims at football facilities on the Penn State University Park campus, hotel rooms at various away games, and in the basement of his own home.

The Sandusky story first broke in March 2011, when PSU alumna and Patriot News reporter Sara Ganim published an article titled “Jerry Sandusky, former Penn State football staffer, subject of grand jury investigation.” The story went largely unnoticed until November 5, 2011, when the Centre County grand jury released its presentment on the case. The grand jury charged Sandusky with up to 40 counts of molesting eight boys from 1994 to 2009 (Attorney General of Pennsylvania 2011). According to court documents obtained by the Daily Collegian, Penn State’s student-run newspaper, the charges included “involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a minor less than 16 years of age, aggravated indecent assault, indecent assault of a minor less than 13 years old and endangering the welfare of a child, among others” (Orso 2011). On the same day, November 5, 2011, Sandusky was arrested and released on a $100,000 bond.
**Crisis:**

A world-renowned institution with a once-spotless reputation was facing accusations of covering up the actions of a severely sick individual for the sake of the name of the school and its football program. The inaction of three university leaders brought widespread ridicule, anger, and disgust upon the entire Penn State community. The University Park campus was suddenly overrun with satellite trucks and news reporters as Penn State found itself at the center of one of the ugliest scandals a university has ever seen.

On Saturday, November 5, 2011, the same day as Sandusky’s arrest, former Athletic Director Tim Curley and former Senior Vice President for Business and Finance Gary Shultz were charged with perjury and failure to report what they knew of the allegations. Former President Graham Spanier released a statement in response to the charges:

> “With regard to the other presentments, I wish to say that Tim Curley and Gary Schultz have my unconditional support. I have known and worked daily with Tim and Gary for more than 16 years. I have complete confidence in how they have handled the allegations about a former University employee.

> “Tim Curley and Gary Schultz operate at the highest levels of honesty, integrity and compassion. I am confident the record will show that these charges are groundless and that they conducted themselves professionally and appropriately” (Penn State News 2011).

The following Monday, November 7, 2011, former Board of Trustees Chairman Steve Garban released a statement in response to the charges filed against Sandusky:

> “The board, along with the entire Penn State family, is shocked and saddened by the allegations involving former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky. Under no circumstances does the University tolerate behavior that would put children at risk, and we are deeply troubled” (Viera 2011).

On the same day, the university announced that Curley and Shultz would step down from their positions. Curley took an administrative leave to protect himself against perjury charges while Shultz planned to retire (Viera 2011).
The next day, Tuesday, November 8, 2011, Spanier canceled former head football coach Joe Paterno’s weekly press conference without reason. Paterno said he was looking forward to the opportunity to address questions about the scandal and was disappointed the press conference was canceled (Ganim 2011).

Paterno announced his retirement on the morning of Wednesday, November 9, 2011. He released the following statement explaining his decision:

“I am absolutely devastated by the developments in this case. I grieve for the children and their families, and I pray for their comfort and relief. I have come to work every day for the last 61 years with one clear goal in mind: To serve the best interests of this university and the young men who have been entrusted to my care. I have the same goal today.

“That's why I have decided to announce my retirement effective at the end of this season. At this moment the Board of Trustees should not spend a single minute discussing my status. They have far more important matters to address. I want to make this as easy for them as I possibly can.

“This is a tragedy. It is one of the great sorrows of my life. With the benefit of hindsight, I wish I had done more.

“My goals now are to keep my commitments to my players and staff and finish the season with dignity and determination. And then I will spend the rest of my life doing everything I can to help this University” (Smith 2011).

Later the same evening, the Penn State Board of Trustees held a late night press conference to announce leadership changes at the university. Below are quotes from the Board’s vice chairman, John Surma:

“The past several days have been absolutely terrible for the entire Penn State community, but the outrage that we feel is nothing compared to the physical and psychological suffering that took place.

“The Penn State Board of Trustees decided tonight that it is in the best interests of the university to have a change in leadership to deal with the difficult issues that we are facing. The Board of Trustees and Graham Spanier have decided that effective immediately, Dr. Spanier is no longer the president of the university. In addition, Joe Paterno is no longer the head football coach effective immediately.

“These decisions were made after careful deliberations and in the best interests of the university as a whole. Penn State has always strived for honesty, integrity,
and the highest world standards in all of our activities. We promise you that we are committed to restoring public trust to our university” (PSU ComRadio 2011).

The Board also named Dr. Rodney A. Erickson, executive vice president and provost, as the interim president of the university and Tom Bradley, assistant coach, as interim head football coach.

These decisions brought Penn State students to the streets. Hundreds gathered in downtown State College—some carried cardboard cutouts of their beloved coach, affectionately known as JoePa, while others waved Penn State flags and chanted “JOE-PA-TERN-O” like they had countless times before in the stands of Beaver Stadium with the coach on the sidelines. Police were sent to patrol the area.

The crowd’s energy turned from somber to violent in a matter of minutes. The group made its way from Beaver Avenue to College Avenue where a news van sat parked along the street. This vehicle symbolized the negative press and media circus that had engulfed Penn State over the past four days and turned the students’ “Happy Valley” into a foreign place. The van was toppled as the mob cheered, feeling some sense of retaliation against the rest of the world. A vast disconnect existed between the student body and its administration, which left a space for confusion and chaos that could have been prevented.

Response:

Penn State’s Board of Trustees hired Omnicom Group agency Ketchum for crisis communications guidance on November 6, 2011—the day after Sandusky’s arrest (Bruell 2011). The university also launched a website, openness.psu.edu (now progress.psu.edu), to increase transparency between the Board of Trustees and its publics. The website serves as a resource for the Penn State community to “learn the latest information about current events, messages from President Erickson, and the Board of Trustees,” according to its homepage.
On Monday, March 12, 2012, the Board of Trustees released a report concerning its November 9 decisions—to remove Graham Spanier as president of the university and Joe Paterno has head football coach. Four months after the fact, the report explained that Spanier was removed because “he failed to meet his leadership responsibilities to the Board and took insufficient action after learning of a 2002 incident involving former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky and a young boy in a Penn State facility.” The report also addressed the decisions involving Paterno, stating that even though he fulfilled his minimal legal duties by informing his immediate superior, Curley, the Board determined that Paterno’s decision “not to do more to follow up constituted a failure of leadership by Coach Paterno” (Penn State News 2012).

According to Steve Manuel, a lecturer of public relations in Penn State’s College of Communications, the best way for Penn State to continue to move on is to “emphasize the positive.” An article from the USA Today quotes Manuel to say:

“All the magnificent things Penn State has done over generations are on one side of the ledger. Jerry Sandusky is on the other. One has nothing to do with the other, and the university needs a massive campaign to emphasize this. But this is going to take a long time to repair” (Gardiner 2011).

Crisis Communications Analysis:

Since at least March 2011, Penn State was aware that the grand jury was considering filing charges against Jerry Sandusky. However, when the news broke, including charges against not only Sandusky, but also against two top university leaders, Penn State was slow to respond. Despite months of notice, the university did not enact a communications plan and, therefore, was severely unprepared in handling the ensuing firestorm of media coverage. This defines the Sandusky scandal as a smoldering crisis.

Penn State failed to tell its story first. The university did not communicate any messages to the public as the scandal began to unfold. The first public communication by the university was four days after the grand jury filed its charges, which is a lifetime in the world of crisis
communications. Since the Board did not enact any type of communications plan, it did not have control over statements released by university leaders and, subsequently, how such messages impacted the university’s already tarnished reputation. Therefore, statements by Spanier and Paterno that were released without the Board’s approval worsened the situation. For example, Spanier’s premature statement giving “unconditional support” to Curley and Shultz was startlingly insensitive. With this message, the former university president appeared to have supported unethical and dishonest behavior by his colleagues, with no mention of empathy toward the victims. This statement was the only communication released by the former president, who disappeared from the public’s eye without a meaningful explanation when the university needed a leader most.

Although Rodney Erickson eventually served as a spokesperson for the university, Penn State should have immediately appointed an individual from administration to serve as the official spokesperson for the institution during the initial developments of the crisis. This spokesperson could have been the ultimate voice of reason during the case, outwardly representing and reinforcing Penn State’s ideals: integrity, honor, success. A spokesperson would have also created a single, isolated source of credible information from the university. Lastly, a spokesperson could have served as a symbol of hope for the Penn State community. Feeling betrayed and heartbroken, the Penn State community, especially the students, needed someone to look to for answers, someone to fight for them.

Paterno’s statement about his retirement was another instance in which Penn State failed to take control of communications. According to Manuel, Paterno was dictating the terms of his departure by announcing he would retire at the end of the 2011 football season. From Manuel’s perspective, Paterno was challenging the Board by instructing them not to spend another minute debating his future. Given the extreme circumstances and resulting power struggle between
Paterno and the trustees, the Board had little or no other choice but to fire the coach (Gardiner 2011). This decision has been the crux of heated debate since November 9, 2011.

Although Paterno made mistakes in the way he announced his retirement plans, Manuel says the longtime coach should have been given the opportunity to speak out about the scandal. Spanier calling off Paterno’s press conference was yet another misstep in the university’s careless handling of the crisis. The last minute cancelation demonstrated a lack of strategy and represented another lost opportunity for Penn State to interject its perspective into the media frenzy. Once again, the university’s culture of silence left the public looking for answers.

The Board’s announcement of the removal of Spanier and Paterno on the evening of Wednesday, November 9, 2011, was another poorly timed communication. Before the announcement, November 9 had already proven to be a pivotal day in Penn State history with the disclosure of Paterno’s retirement. This concept was more than enough for students, fans, and others to process as the realization became clear that only three games were left with the renowned football coach.

The Board’s announcement on the evening of November 9 was highly anticipated. People across the country crowded around their television screens, watching the press conference and waiting for the trustees to declare the leadership changes at Penn State. Suddenly, with just a few sentences, John Surma turned Penn State upside-down. Two of the school’s most iconic leaders were gone, and the Penn State community felt more lost than ever.

Students who resided in downtown State College took to the streets in what was largely interpreted as an angry riot. As I stood atop a parking garage on Beaver Avenue, watching the commotion, I felt confusion, betrayal, and isolation emanating from the crowd. I solely believe students rushed the downtown area to create some sense of unity. Of course, some took this feeling farther than others. Some acted out in violence while others just stood by, content standing among their fellow students amidst the chaos. Almost overnight, the entire Penn State
University was placed under the world’s microscope, and students grew tired of being ignored by their own leaders. The riot was an outcry by the student body for the trustees and other administrators to create open dialogue with the public.

The Penn State community was receiving information about the scandal in bits and pieces from various sources instead of in a constant stream from the university. The latter would have cultivated public trust and, therefore, created a united source of support for the university and its decisions moving forward with the crisis. However, since the university appeared to be deliberately withholding information from the public, a sense of opposition emerged between the Board of Trustees and the Penn State community. Considering this, the riot could have been avoided if Paterno’s firing did not come as another crude piece of information, but as a logical next step in handling the crisis.

Lastly, the Board suffered timing issues again in March 2012 with the release of its report, explaining its decisions on the removal of Spanier and Paterno. At this point, four months had passed, and the Penn State community was slowly healing as it coped with the changes that had transformed the university. Penn State finally seemed to be moving forward, until an email sent from the Board to students, faculty, and others reopened old wounds.

The report began as follows:

“The Pennsylvania State University Board of Trustees has been asked by members of the Penn State community, including students, faculty, staff and alumni, to state clearly its reasons for the difficult decisions that were made unanimously on the evening of Nov. 9, 2011 -- to remove Graham Spanier as president of the University and Joe Paterno as head football coach for the remaining three games of the 2011 season. Our decisions were guided by our obligation as Trustees, always, to put the interests of the University first” (Penn State News 2012).

As mentioned in the “Response” section of this chapter, the report went on to justify the decisions made by the Board in November. While the gesture of explanation was potentially commendable, it came four months too late. The entities addressed in the report’s opening
sentence wanted and deserved answers on Wednesday, November 9, 2011, during the Board’s press conference, not several months after the fact. By this time, the Penn State community had developed a negative disposition toward the Board of Trustees. Therefore, communication disseminated from the governing body of the university was met with skepticism. Also, the report came almost two months after Joe Paterno’s death, so the email could have easily been interpreted as inconsiderate and callous. Ultimately, the email was a step backward as it reminded the public of the hardship endured in November.

Overall, Penn State’s handling of the Sandusky scandal was haphazard at best. The university lacked a clear strategy in its communications and left its publics in the dark as developments in the case surfaced. Therefore, the public was forced to gather information from various media outlets, which gave biased accounts of the story that mostly placed blame on the entire university instead of focusing on the root of the problem: Jerry Sandusky. Penn State sacrificed several opportunities to stand up for itself at the onset of the crisis. A prepared communications strategy would have saved the university much public scrutiny in the long run, but the school failed to take hold of the situation and shape perceptions from the get-go. The climate of silence further incriminated the institution, leaving the Penn State community without a spokesperson to communicate the university’s stance during the crisis and to guide the school’s public persona through its lowest point in history.
Chapter 7

The Sandusky Scandal: The Perfect Media Storm

Each of the crises discussed offers valuable insight into crisis communications management at the university level—lessons Penn State could have easily benefitted from in handling the Sandusky scandal. The administration leading the school during November 2011 could have exercised hindsight and utilized all available forms of technology to communicate with its publics in a timely manner, modeling the actions taken by Penn State’s leaders following the 1996 shooting. Considering Virginia Tech’s crisis communications plan, which has been widely scrutinized for its delays, Penn State’s administration could have worked to disseminate news to the public as soon as information became available. Quicker action could have helped Penn State tell its story first and shape the news according to its terms, not the media’s.

The situations at Syracuse and UNC relate to Penn State more intimately. Bernie Fine and Jerry Sandusky’s stories consist of similar elements: A university assistant athletic coach, who was viewed as a local mentor, allegedly exploits the sporting program he represents by using it to prey on young boys for sexual satisfaction. Although the stories end very differently (Fine acquitted and Sandusky sentenced to at least 30 years in prison), each resulted in significant reputational damage to their respective universities. However, Penn State still had an opportunity to learn from Syracuse, whose chancellor carefully crafted statements to disassociate the scandal with her university and, subsequently, favorably shaping public opinion. UNC’s story also shares commonalities with Penn State’s: A well-respected college football program comes under fire because of suspected corruption among the institution’s faculty. Penn State and UNC were right to implement leadership changes in efforts to disassociate negative dispositions the public held toward the institutions. Both universities should also be commended for practicing transparent
communication by creating websites as public resources of information on developments in the cases.

Although the first four crises discussed did generate substantial buzz, Penn State’s Sandusky scandal took the brunt of media coverage. From a journalistic perspective, it was the perfect storm of information to capture reader attention—A storied football program built on “success with honor” and led by one of the most iconic football coaches of all time falls victim to the heinous acts of a onetime local hero. The headlines practically wrote themselves. News outlets across the country took hold of the story early on and began shaping public opinion in record time. The coverage was unstoppable because Penn State stayed quiet. Within a day’s time, the scandal captured national media attention. There are three main reasons why the Sandusky story dominated headlines: timeliness, prominence, and impact.

Timeliness refers to when news is happening and how stories are being covered (Lanson and Mitchell 2008). The Sandusky scandal captured vast press coverage starting on November 5, 2011, when the grand jury released its graphic report on the case. The media became infatuated with the developments at Penn State, so much so that Syracuse’s case of similar content, which was surfacing around the same time, could have diluted the Sandusky story. The scandal went viral almost two weeks before the allegations against Bernie Fine went public. This was a significant amount of time for reporters, bloggers, and the like to carve out a space in the news media for the Sandusky story to live. The scandal at Penn State was being covered extensively and was attracting an extraordinary amount of reader interest. This is largely because developments in the Sandusky scandal were unfolding rapidly, which allowed for journalists to publish fresh, more timely aspects of the story for weeks. The news is impatient, and headlines fade fast. Therefore, the media was able to retain the public’s attention by writing about the scandal from different angles, divulging new information that helped readers piece the complex story together.
Prominence refers to news stories that revolve around particularly well-known individuals (Lanson and Mitchell 2008). Such people add more news value to stories simply because of their status in society. The Sandusky scandal featured a legendary football coach, a one-time local hero, and a widely renowned academic institution—three elements that related to a very large number of people, and, therefore, spanned an enormous potential reach. Once the media discovered Joe Paterno’s connection to the story, the football icon’s name was incorporated into countless headlines. This not only drew attention to newsstands nationwide, but also drove online views.

As the news continues to move to the digital space, search engine optimization (SEO) is becoming more and more valuable to modern journalism. SEO is the practice of improving and promoting a web site in order to increase the number of visitors the site receives from search engines. The majority of web traffic is driven by major commercial search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo!. Although social media and other types of traffic can generate visits, search engines are the primary method of navigation for most digital news consumers (The Beginner’s Guide to SEO 2012). For journalists, this means making online news content findable and relevant. Since “searchable” headlines are crucial to news agency exposure, reporters must craft headlines that match user search queries. During the Sandusky scandal, names like “Joe Paterno” and “Penn State” appeared more often than Sandusky himself in news headlines because online readers were more likely to enter these terms in search boxes to find information about the scandal at Penn State.

**Figure 7-1: Search Engine Traffic Drivers**

Source: SEOmoz.org
The charts on the following pages were generated using Google Trends, a public web service provided by Google Inc. Based on Google Search, the tool shows how often a particular search-term has been entered relative to the total search-volume. The main graph represents the amount of news category searches including the terms Joe Paterno, Jerry Sandusky, and Penn State from 2004 – present. The spikes on the graph starting in October 2011 illustrate the beginning of the scandal as indicated by the search traffic for the three terms. The letter-designations above several of the spikes on the graphs are links to popular news articles. This is a helpful tool for news agencies to understand how their readers are searching for news online.
Figure 7-2: News Searches Related to Scandal

Source: Google Trends
Figure 7-3: News Searches Before Scandal and After Sentencing

Source: Google Trends
Journalists are constantly measuring how certain stories affect their audiences. This evaluation is frequently used to make news judgments about what stories to pursue. Reporters usually decide to run articles that have the most impact. This is because events with the greatest impact on the most readers carry the most news value (Lanson and Mitchell 2008). Impact can be triggered by proximity, which does not necessarily refer to geographical distance in terms of the news. A story with which someone shares a particular bond or similarity is also considered to have proximity. In terms of the Sandusky scandal, proximity takes on both meanings, which made the story exceptionally newsworthy.

In a geographical sense, the scandal affected the students, faculty, and staff of Penn State as well as the residents of State College and its surrounding communities. While these populations make up a significant portion of the story’s audience, proximity’s second meaning encompassed a broader group of people. First, anyone associated with Penn State was impacted by the scandal in some way. While many different sects of people associated with the university exist, the school’s alumni base will be used as an example to portray the size of this audience. Currently, there are 560,658 Penn State alumni throughout the world (Alumni Association Overview 2012). That accounts for over half a million people that connected with the story. All individuals involved with Jerry Sandusky’s The Second Mile were also affected. This includes everyone from major donors, to volunteers, to participants and their families. Furthermore, anyone who had been subjected to sexual abuse related to the victims of the scandal on an emotional level. Lastly, any parent who read about the scandal and learned of the child victims connected with the story. These readers most likely put themselves in the shoes of the victims’ parents and imagined how they themselves would react to such grave injustices against their own children. While these groups represent a substantial part of the Sandusky scandal’s audience, they do not cover its entirety. The sects mentioned above only begin to illustrate the impact of the story and why it held reader interest for almost one year.
Chapter 8
Marketing Implications and Future Recommendations

Marketing Implications:

The media coverage of the Sandusky scandal played a large role in shaping perceptions of the university held by the public. As mentioned earlier, Penn State remained mostly silent during the initial developments in November 2011 as the press painted a very negative picture of the institution with their publications about the scandal. The days following the first reports on the crisis were very sensitive because perceptions could still be influenced by messages from the media and the university. The media made many arguments against the innocence of former members within Penn State’s administration while the university struggled to get its communications together to defend itself. Through a consumer behavior lens, this section will discuss relevant theories to examine what marketing activities Penn State should pursue moving forward from the crisis.

The illusion of the truth effect states that consumers are likely to have stronger beliefs about a product when they hear the same message repeatedly. Instead of evaluating information associated with the product, consumers use familiarity with the message to judge its veracity (Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters 2013). Considering the intense media coverage of the scandal, the press was a major driver of the truth effect across several of Penn State’s audiences, including current students, prospective students, alumni, faculty, and the general public among others. Through mere exposure and classical conditioning, messages from the news media strengthened negative associations toward the institution by constantly pairing Penn State with the Sandusky
scandal. Considering today’s 24-hour news cycle, frequent exposure to unfavorable newscasts toward Penn State increased their believability, reinforcing negative associations.

The extent of this effect depends on interpretation and frame of reference. Interpretation refers to how individuals make sense of available information. Given the verbal, digital, and physical public response to the news, the public certainly paid attention to media messages about Penn State and the Sandusky scandal. Consequently, University Relations faculty should investigate how these messages were comprehended by different audiences in order to develop an effective marketing plan in the aftermath of the crisis. A person’s frame of reference mainly determines how a message is understood. This means an individual applies experiences, perception, attitudes, and values to a communication situation in order to understand a message (Belch and Belch 2012). For example, those connected to Penn State most likely interpreted negative press about the university differently than those with no ties to the school. Both groups, therefore, have different experiences and expectations that influence perception. Those in the Penn State camp have previously processed information about the university that has been retained in their long-term memories. This type of information is hard to refute, especially when messages are inconsistent with what a person believes. Conversely, those without prior knowledge of Penn State are more easily swayed by adverse messages because they have no long-term memories inhibiting the acceptance of such information. Although these groups represent the two extremes of the audience spectrum, they serve to illustrate that different groups need different information depending on their prior perceptions.

Considering the significant amount of reputational damage Penn State suffered from the Sandusky scandal, marketing faculty in University Relations should work to change unfavorable attitudes toward the school to prevent decline of deference. The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) states that persuasive communications (such as ads or campaigns) lead to persuasion by influencing attitudes. According to this model, “the attitude formation or change process depends
on the amount and nature of elaboration, or processing, of relevant information that occurs in
response to a persuasive message.” ELM is a function of two elements, motivation and ability,
that process the message. Motivation depends on factors such as involvement, personal
relevance, and an individual’s needs and arousal levels. Ability depends on an individual’s
knowledge, intellectual capacity, and opportunity to process the message (Belch and Belch 2012).

ELM can accomplish attitude change through two basic routes:

**Central Route Processing:** The receiver is viewed as a very active, involved
participant in the communication process whose ability and motivation to attend,
comprehend, and evaluate messages are high. When central processing of an
advertising message occurs, the consumer pays close attention to message
content and scrutinizes the message’s arguments.

**Peripheral Route Processing:** The receiver is viewed as lacking the motivation
or ability to process information and is not likely to engage in detailed cognitive
processing. Rather than evaluating the information presented in the message, the
receiver relies on peripheral cues that may be incidental to the main arguments.
The receiver’s reaction to the message depends on how he or she valuates these
peripheral cues (Belch and Belch 2012, 168-169).

Penn State’s marketing activities should not only meet its audiences’ motivation and
ability, but also provide information that satisfies their needs in order to successfully shift their
attitudes. In the case of the Sandusky scandal, audience needs would include transparency,
reassurance, and trust.

**Future Recommendations:**

Below I have developed three recommendations based on the crisis communications
analyses in the case study and marketing implications discussed in this chapter for Penn State, as
well as other universities, to follow in handling crisis situations in the future.

1. **Embrace Digital Communications**

With developments like mobile phones, tablets, and laptops, communications technology
has become a part of everyday life. The most recent communications phenomenon has been the
explosion of social media through these devices and how consumers use such websites to interact
with each other. Now that the Internet is readily accessible, social media has become embedded in society as users frequently post, tweet, or pin updates to fellow users. Since an increasing number of people are interacting in this digital space, social media provides a powerful tool in crisis communications management.

What most distinguishes social media from traditional media (television, print, etc.) is the fact that social media allows for two-way dialogue between an entity and the public. Where traditional media only delivers content to the public, social media involves users in content generation and discussion. This characteristic creates an opportunity for organizations to actively engage with its publics. Such two-way communication also holds organizations more accountable to its publics. With communication between organization and user being so feasible, an organization has a responsibility to share news and information in a timely manner, especially during times of crisis. If this does not occur, social media can turn into a major threat to an organization as users turn to other less legitimate sources for information. Or, worse, users create their own inaccurate information about a situation and share it with the World Wide Web. Considering the multiplier effect of social media, this could be catastrophic.

Social media was not on Penn State’s side during the Sandusky scandal. The university failed to see the digital platform as a communications aide. Its football Facebook and Twitter accounts took hiatuses during the crisis. Below is an excerpt from a June 23, 2012 Huffington Post article, which includes an interview with Kelly Burns, a Penn State Master of Business Administration graduate. Burns interned with Penn State Football Marketing & Promotions from May 2009 until April 2012.

“The grand jury investigation was initiated in the spring of 2008 but had been kept quiet. In the summer of 2011 Burns was told to remove photos of Sandusky from the Facebook page. The social media team was told to stop posting onto Facebook on November 5, 2011.

“On November 4, 2011 Sandusky was indicted and the next day he was arrested and charged and the story went worldwide instantly. ‘Our Facebook and
@PennStateFball Twitter lit up but that was difficult because initially we were not allowed to post,’ Burns says. ‘We were not permitted to post anything about the scandal, nor were any other people working for the University. We were told to wait until Old Main [Penn State's administrative center on campus which includes the university president's office] made a statement before we could say anything. So we went completely dark.’

“On November 11, the social media team was permitted to post about The Blue Ribbon Campaign against child abuse and then on November 16 they were allowed to post some simple messages about football but still nothing about the crisis itself was allowed. Even today, nothing about the scandal has ever been talked about on Penn State social media” (Scott 2012).

A recent study on social media and higher education suggests that the majority of school officials are underutilizing social media in times of crisis. The study, #SocialMedia and Advancement: Insights from Three Years of Data, surveyed 1,187 college officials in January and February 2012. According to the study’s findings, only 22 percent of the 2012 respondents indicated that their institutions utilized social media in times of crises (Slover-Linett and Stoner 2012). Mike Lesczinki, public relations manager at Excelsior College in Albany, New York, thinks many institutions will be incorporating social media into crisis communications in the future:

“Because students tend to tune out single streams of information, it is vital that institutions use a variety of channels such as E-mail, social [media], and text [messages]. Institutions have to ensure they are participating in the conversation both to correct inaccuracies and because students are more prone to seeking out trustworthy sources” (Wecker 2012).

In the future, Penn State should work to integrate a social media component into its crisis communications plans in order to have a presence where its publics are communicating. This would have encouraged transparency through two-way dialogue, which would have cultivated a more favorable public perception of Penn State. This, in turn, would have mitigated much of the scrutiny the university experienced.
2. Assess Vulnerabilities

Identifying vulnerabilities allows an institution to correct problems over which administration has some control and prepare for those over which administration has little or no control (Millar and Smith 2002). While several methods exist for assessing an organization’s vulnerability, most seem to gravitate toward four categories:

1. “Guesstimate” potential crises
2. Track media coverage
3. Self-analyze for smoldering crises
4. Hire outsiders to perform a vulnerability study (Millar and Smith 2002)

In terms of the Sandusky scandal, Penn State would have benefitted most from tracking media coverage and self-analyzing for a smoldering crisis. Monitoring the media includes practices such as reading relevant newspapers, listening to radio and television news broadcasts, skimming news stories on the Web, and searching electronic databases for crisis reports. A chronology of findings would help reveal what types of crises occur most often at the collegiate level (Millar and Smith 2002). This would, in turn, help the monitoring university discover what situations to be most sensitive to.

Monitoring the media would also teach an institution the most and least effective ways to handle a crisis in terms of crisis communications and marketing. By following crises at other universities, Penn State could have benefitted from identifying what communications and marketing practices were most successful during different predicaments. Of course every situation is different, however, some background knowledge would be helpful in proactive planning when a crisis hits.

Self-analyzing for a smoldering crisis helps an organization visualize the future through scenario building. A team of key administration should inspect all areas of the institution from
two perspectives: as a dangerous place and as an enemy in danger of being destroyed. Using the strengths and weaknesses identified during inspection, worst-case scenarios can be created for administration and employees to work through (Millar and Smith 2002). This practice will prepare a university for the worst possible consequences it could face.

3. Perform a Crisis Communications Physical and Build a Plan

Crises stretch the limits of an organization’s financial, personnel, and communications resources among others. A crisis communications physical measures an organization’s readiness to respond to stress. Specifically, the physical examines the communication system of an organization. By completing the questionnaire included in Appendix D, Penn State can score itself on level of preparedness and work to improve for future crises (Millar and Smith 2002).

Building a crisis communications plan before the onset of a crisis is crucial. This gives all employees at all levels of an organization the opportunity to understand how communication will be used to inform internal and external audiences of the events. The plan will also set expectations on what information can be shared with the public while an institution is working to contain the crisis and uphold its image.

The first part of the plan includes a statement of purpose, defines the crisis, and identifies the crisis team. The second part provides an overview of the crisis and describes how the plan arms the university’s leadership with the resources to effectively manage the crisis. This section also outlines roles and responsibilities for all employees, the most important being the crisis team. The next part of the plan details the duties and chain of command associated with the crisis team (Millar and Smith 2002).

The majority of the crisis communications plan includes pre-approved strategies, priorities, and messages for the most likely kinds of crises the university will experience based on the crisis communications self-assessment and physical. This section designates a spokesperson and, at its most basic level, tells administration what to do and what to say. Audiences are also
identified in this part of the plan, which outlines what should be done to communicate with them depending on the crisis category (Millar and Smith 2002). Other sections can be added as needed.

**Final Thoughts:**

All organizations, including universities, will inevitably face crises. Therefore, collegiate institutions must anticipate such predicaments by preparing for the worst through the recommendations described above. By working to foster timely two-way dialogue with all audiences using relevant forms of communications technology, universities can maintain a sense of brand loyalty among its publics. Such preparation and transparency by the institution will uphold its public image and, therefore, generate favorable dispositions among internal and external audiences, who will stand by the school during its toughest moments.
Appendix A
The Patriot-News Article that Broke the Sandusky Story

Jerry Sandusky, former Penn State football staffer, subject of grand jury investigation

Published: Thursday, March 31, 2011, 8:00 AM
Updated: Thursday, March 31, 2011, 8:20 AM

Penn State football legend Jerry Sandusky is the subject of a grand jury investigation into allegations that he indecently assaulted a teenage boy.

According to five people with knowledge of the case, a grand jury meeting in Harrisburg has been hearing testimony for at least 18 months about the allegation, which was made in 2009 by a 15-year-old from Clinton County.

The teen told authorities that Sandusky had inappropriate contact with him over a four-year period, starting when he was 10.

Penn State coach Joe Paterno, athletic director Tim Curley and retired university Vice President and Treasurer Gary Schultz were among those who appeared before the grand jury in January at the attorney general’s Strawberry Square office complex, according to a person with knowledge of the investigation. Attempts to reach the three for comment were unsuccessful.

It is not clear whether university President Graham Spanier has testified and he declined comment on the matter when questioned earlier this week.

At one time, Sandusky was considered Paterno’s likely successor. During his 32 years on the sidelines, the State College man was credited with turning Penn State into Linebacker U., producing such pro football greats as Jack Ham and LaVar Arrington.

Sandusky, 67, retired from Penn State shortly after the Alamo Bowl in December 1999. In his 2000 autobiography, “Touched: The Jerry Sandusky Story,” he says he decided to leave after he “came to the realization I was not destined to become the head football coach at Penn State.”
He spent the next 11 years focused on running The Second Mile, a nonprofit he founded in 1977 that reaches 10,000 Pennsylvania youths a year through summer and year-round camp programs. The charity was honored by President George H.W. Bush in 1990 as a “Point of Light.”

Last fall, Sandusky announced that he was retiring from day-to-day involvement in the charity to spend more time with family and handle personal matters.

Since then, rumors of misconduct by Sandusky have lit up Internet comment threads and message boards that are normally havens for Penn State football fan chatter.

Repeated efforts to reach Sandusky over several weeks to comment on the investigation have been unsuccessful. He has not responded to phone calls and other attempts to reach him at his home or through attorney Joseph Amendola in State College.

As is standard policy, the attorney general’s office would neither confirm nor deny whether a grand jury was meeting about Sandusky.

**The 2009 investigation**

The allegations against Sandusky surfaced in 2009, when he was volunteering as an assistant high school football coach at Central Mountain High School in Clinton County.

It was there the 15-year-old student told school officials that Sandusky had touched him inappropriately while they were alone in a gym.

John DiNunzio, Keystone Central School District’s interim superintendent at the time, said the boy’s mother reported the incident to the school principal and head football coach. At that point, DiNunzio said he was notified.

DiNunzio said he never spoke to the mother or the child. He said the principal and coach told him the boy alleged the “inappropriate” incident happened while the two were alone in a room on wrestling mats.

“It was strictly a touching type of situation,” DiNunzio said of the allegations. DiNunzio, who is now interim superintendent with the Bellefonte Area School District, called Clinton County Children and Youth Services. Once it left his desk, he says, he never heard a word from police.
“It’s been a hush-hush situation,” DiNunzio said. “I’ve actually called [the school] — they’ve said they heard nothing about it.”

According to sources, the boy told Children and Youth Services that Sandusky had indecent contact with him several times over four years.

Children and Youth Services investigated the boy’s story and sent the case to Clinton County District Attorney Michael Salisbury. His office forwarded it to Centre County, where the incidents were alleged to have taken place.

Then-Centre County District Attorney Michael Madeira transferred the case to then-state Attorney General Tom Corbett in March 2009. Corbett, now governor, declined comment through his spokesman.

Kelly Hastings, current superintendent of Keystone Central School District, said she has no first-hand knowledge of the report and that no documents from the school have been subpoenaed by police.

DiNunzio, who has had a long career in education, said he was shocked when he heard the allegation and surprised that he was not contacted again.

“No one has ever called me about it in any way shape or form,” he said.

When Sandusky quit as a volunteer in 2009 with Central Mountain High School, he told officials there he was leaving to devote more time to The Second Mile, DiNunzio said. Sandusky retired from The Second Mile about a year and a half later.

Second Mile Executive Director Dr. Jack Raykovitz, wrote in an email: “While we are aware of the rumors circulating regarding Mr. Sandusky, we believe it would be inappropriate to respond to rumors. Further ... I am aware of no investigation of The Second Mile or our programs.”

A Second Mile Board member, who asked not to be named, said Sandusky informed the board of the allegations against him and the investigation. At that point in time, Sandusky distanced himself from the kids but continued fundraising for the organization for a period of time before he finally retired, the board member said.

“We all know there’s an investigation going on,” the board member said.
Earlier allegation

Two months ago, state police at Rockview in Centre County began calling witnesses to a May 1998 report by Penn State University police detailing an earlier allegation of inappropriate contact against Sandusky by another boy.

According to several sources, that boy, who was 12 at the time, alleged he and Sandusky were showering in the football building on Penn State’s campus when the incident took place. The boy’s mother told The Patriot-News she was specifically instructed by state police at Rockview not to speak with a reporter. Her name is being withheld by The Patriot-News to protect the identity of her son.

No charges were ever filed against Sandusky.

According to sources close to the investigation, the boy told police in 1998 that Sandusky had showered with him in a locker room of the Lasch Building — home to the football program — during a tour. The boy claimed Sandusky washed his body during the shower, sources said.

As part of the May 1998 investigation, police had the boy’s mother call Sandusky to her State College home and confront him while they hid in another room, according to sources.

Another boy, now an adult in the armed forces, was named as a witness in the 1998 Penn State police report and has been contacted by state police, his wife confirmed.

When reached by phone, his mother said she took her son to Penn State police for questioning in 1998 but didn’t listen to the interview. She said she never asked her son what happened. Retired Penn State Police Officer Ron Schreffler handled the 1998 case. When approached recently, Schreffler said he couldn’t comment and asked a reporter, “How did you see that report?”

While the grand jury has been hearing testimony, Sandusky has been devoting time to fundraising for The Second Mile.

In January, the organization received the go-ahead from Centre County commissioners to apply for a $3 million state grant to pay for an $8.5 million learning center on 60 acres near the University Park Airport.

The facility would eventually include housing for up to 100 children.
Sandusky’s devotion to the program was the reason he gave for turning down job offers for football head coaching jobs at Temple University and the University of Maryland. In his autobiography, Sandusky wrote, “Any time you deal with young people, there will be extreme highs and lows. There have been moments of frustration, despair and heartache.”

In 2007, the statute of limitations for sex crimes against minors was extended so that police have until the alleged victim’s 50th birthday to file charges. That applies to any alleged victim of child sex abuse who turned 18 on or after Aug. 27, 2002.
Appendix B

Sandusky Scandal: Timeline of Events from the New York Times

1969: Jerry Sandusky, a starting defensive end at Penn State under Coach Rip Engle from 1963 to 1965, joins Joe Paterno’s coaching staff as the defensive line coach.

1977: Sandusky establishes the Second Mile, a foundation to help needy children. The organization plans activities and programs for the children.

1994: A boy identified as Victim 7 in the grand jury report meets Sandusky through the Second Mile at about the age of 10.

1994-1995: A boy identified as Victim 6 meets Sandusky at a picnic put on by the Second Mile when he is 7 or 8.

1995-1996: Victim 5 meets Sandusky through the Second Mile when he is 7 or 8.

1996-1997: Victim 4 meets Sandusky through the Second Mile when he is 12 or 13.

1996-1998: Victim 5 is taken by Sandusky to the locker rooms and showers at Penn State. He was 8 to 10 years old.

Jan. 1, 1998: Victim 4 is listed as a member of the Sandusky family party for the 1998 Outback Bowl.

May 3, 1998: Victim 6 is assaulted in the locker rooms and showers at Penn State when he is 11. His mother reports that Sandusky showered with her son to university police.

May 4-30, 1998: University vice president Gary C. Schultz is informed. His notes of that date say: “Behavior — at best inappropriate @ worst sexual improprieties.” He also notes, “Is this opening of pandora’s box?” and “Other children?”

During the course of the investigation, police listen in on a conversation between the mother and Sandusky, who admits to showering with the boy, and says: “I was wrong. I wish I could get forgiveness. I know I won’t get it from you. I wish I were dead.”

University police chief Harmon emails Schultz: “We’re going to hold off on making any crime log entry. At this point I can justify that decision because of the lack of clear evidence of a crime.”

Tim Curley, the athletic director, notifies Schultz that he has told Penn State Coach Joe Paterno about the incident, and later emails: “Anything new in this department? Coach is anxious to know where it stands.” Paterno maintained before his death that he didn't know about the incident.
June 1998: A university police detective and a state public welfare caseworker interview Sandusky, who admits hugging victim 6 in the shower, but says there was nothing "sexual about it." He says he has done this with other children. District Attorney Ray Gricar decides there will be no criminal charges.

May 1999: Paterno informs Sandusky at a meeting that he will not become the team’s next head coach. Victim 4 later testifies that Sandusky appeared emotionally upset after the meeting and that he was told by Sandusky to not tell anyone about the meeting.

Summer, 1999: Curley says Paterno gives Sandusky an option to stay on as an assistant, but Sandusky proposes instead running a middle school football camp, and finding "ways to continue to work with young people through Penn State." The university agrees to "work collaboratively" with Sandusky on Second Mile, and gives him free lifetime use of the East Area Locker Room.

July 1999: Victim 3 is assaulted in the athletic department's building and other places several times from July through December 2001.

Dec. 28, 1999: Victim 4 is listed as a member of the Sandusky family party at the 1999 Alamo Bowl, Sandusky’s final game as defensive coordinator. Sandusky is said to have threatened to send the boy home after the child resists sexual advances. Sandusky reportedly tells the boy that he can walk on the field with Penn State’s football team. The boy is in a photograph with Sandusky that appears in Sports Illustrated.

Fall 2000: Jim Calhoun, a janitor, finds Sandusky in the showers of the football building performing oral sex on a boy pinned against a wall. The boy is identified as Victim 8 in the grand jury report. Neither the janitor nor a fellow employee he told about the incident made a report because, according to prosecutors, they were worried about their job security. The janitor’s supervisor, who also was informed, did not file a report either.

Feb. 9, 2001: Mike McQueary, a graduate assistant, enters a Penn State locker room and hears “rhythmic, slapping sounds” that he believes are related to sexual activity. He later says under oath that he sees Sandusky raping a boy who appears to be 10 years old. He leaves and meets with his father and decides to report the incident to Paterno, according to prosecutors.

Feb. 10, 2001: The next morning, McQueary reports what he saw to Paterno. Paterno tells him: “You did what you had to do. It’s my job now to figure out what we want to do.” Before he died, Paterno insisted McQueary did not tell him of the extent of the assault that McQueary said he witnessed, only that McQueary had seen something inappropriate involving Sandusky and a child.

Feb. 11, 2001: Paterno reports the incident to Schultz and university president Graham B. Spanier on Sunday because he did not "want to interfere with their weekends."

Feb. 25, 2001: Schultz, Spanier and Tim Curley, the athletic director, decide to report the shower incident to the state Department of Public Welfare.

Feb. 27, 2001: Curley informs Shultz and Spanier that he has changed his mind after “talking it over with Joe” Paterno. Instead of reporting the incident, he says they should offer Sandusky
“professional help” and tell him to stop bringing guests to the locker room. Spanier worries that if Sandusky continues, “we then become vulnerable for not having reported it,” before agreeing the approach is “humane.” They do not report the incident.

**March 5, 2001:** Curley tells Sandusky the university is “uncomfortable” with the incident, and will report it to his foundation. He also tells Sandusky to stop bringing children to the athletic facilities. Sandusky offers to give Curley the boy’s name, but Curley did not want to know, according to Sandusky’s counsel. McQueary is never questioned by police.

**August 2001:** Sandusky assaults Victim 5 in the shower at Penn State.

**Sept 21, 2001:** The university sells a parcel of land to Second Mile without any disclosure from officials to the Board of Trustees about the Sandusky events. Schultz approves a press release praising Sandusky's work with Second Mile.

**2005-2006:** Sandusky meets the boy identified as Victim 1 through the Second Mile. He is 11 or 12 years old.

**April 2005:** Ray Gricar, the former district attorney who chose not to prosecute Sandusky in 1998, disappears. The circumstances are murky: his car is found abandoned, his laptop is recovered months later in a river without a hard drive and his body is never found.

**Spring 2008:** Victim 1 is now a freshman in a Clinton County high school. His mother calls the school to report a sexual assault, and Sandusky, who was a volunteer coach at the school, is barred from the school district. The matter is reported to the authorities.

**Early 2009:** An investigation by the Pennsylvania attorney general begins. Victim 1 tells the authorities that Sandusky has inappropriately touched him several times over a four-year period. A grand jury subpoenas university documents in 2010, but no one tells the Board of Trustees of the university's potential complicity.

**September 2010:** Sandusky steps down from the Second Mile, saying he wants to spend more time with his family and to handle personal matters.

**Winter 2011:** The grand jury summons Schultz, Spanier, Curley and Paterno to testify in its investigation. On Mar. 31, a newspaper reports their appearance. No report is ever made to the university's Board of Trustees about the events.

**May 11, 2011:** A trustee who has read the newspaper article inquires about the investigation, and at the May 11 meeting, Spanier briefs trustees but does not raise the issue of its impact on the university. The board takes no action to investigate further.

**Nov. 5, 2011:** Sandusky is arrested on charges of sexually abusing eight boys over a 15-year period. He is arraigned and released on $100,000 bail after being charged with 40 counts.

Curley and Schultz are charged with perjury and failure to report what they knew of the allegations.
Nov. 7, 2011: Penn State announces Curley and Schultz will step down. Curley will take an administrative leave to defend himself against perjury charges, and Schultz will retire.

Nov. 9, 2011: Joe Paterno announces he plans to retire at the end of the football season, but the statement is apparently released without the approval of the university’s Board of Trustees.

Later in the day the board fires Paterno and the university’s president. The Department of Education says it will investigate the university’s handling of the abuse allegations.

Nov. 13, 2011: Jack Raykovitz, the chief executive of the Second Mile for 28 years, resigns. Raykovitz’s failure to do more to stop Sandusky had been a focal point of criticism.

Nov. 14, 2011: Sandusky makes his first extended public comments since his arrest. In a phone interview with Bob Costas that is broadcast on the television program “Rock Center,” Sandusky says he is innocent of the charges against him and declares that he is not a pedophile. He did say, “I shouldn’t have showered with those kids.”

Nov. 18, 2011: The Second Mile is preparing to fold as it tries to reconstruct what it knew, and did, about any suspicions or allegations against Sandusky over the years.

Dec. 1, 2011: A lawsuit by Victim 4, which was meant to prevent Second Mile from transferring its assets, is settled. The charity will notify the Pennsylvania attorney general and seek court approval before the transfer of assets or before closing the charity.

Jan. 22, 2012: Joe Paterno dies in State College, Pa. He was 85. The cause was lung cancer.

June 11, 2012: Prosecutors open their sexual abuse case against Jerry Sandusky, who is charged with more than 50 criminal counts of abusing 10 boys over a number of years.

June 21, 2012: Lawyers for one of Jerry Sandusky’s adopted children, Matt Sandusky, say that he had been abused by Sandusky and had offered to testify in the case. No details are given why prosecutors did not call Matt Sandusky to testify.

June 22, 2012: Jerry Sandusky is convicted of sexually abusing 10 boys. He was found guilty of 45 of the 48 counts against him.

July 12, 2012: Louis J. Freeh, the former federal judge and director of the F.B.I., releases his report after leading an independent investigation of the scandal. The report accuses Paterno, the university’s former president and others of deliberately hiding facts about Sandusky’s sexually predatory behavior.

July 22, 2012: The bronze statue of Joe Paterno located outside of Beaver Stadium is removed because it would be a “recurring wound to the multitude of individuals across the nation and beyond who have been the victims of child abuse,” according to Rodney Erickson, the university’s president.

July 23, 2012: The N.C.A.A. fines Penn State $60 million, bans the football team from postseason play for four years, reduces scholarships for four years, and vacates the university’s football victories from 1998-2011.
Appendix C

Report of the Board of Trustees Concerning Nov. 9 Decisions

The Pennsylvania State University Board of Trustees has been asked by members of the Penn State community, including students, faculty, staff and alumni, to state clearly its reasons for the difficult decisions that were made unanimously on the evening of Nov. 9, 2011 -- to remove Graham Spanier as president of the University and Joe Paterno as head football coach for the remaining three games of the 2011 season. Our decisions were guided by our obligation as Trustees, always, to put the interests of the University first.

We share the grief of the entire Penn State family at the passing of Coach Paterno. We also continue to respect and appreciate Dr. Spanier’s and Coach Paterno’s lasting contributions to Penn State. We especially honor the great legacy of Coach Paterno in making his football program a model for his emphasis on academic as well as athletic performance and for his generous support of Penn State through the years.

We offer this report guided by one overriding commitment going forward -- to remember the children who may have been victims of sexual abuse on or near the University Park campus over the last 10 or more years and to support their healing process as best we can.

President Graham Spanier

We determined on Nov. 9 that Dr. Spanier should be removed because he failed to meet his leadership responsibilities to the Board and took insufficient action after learning of a 2002 incident involving former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky and a young boy in a Penn State facility. This failure of leadership included insufficiently informing the Board about his knowledge of the 2002 incident. He also made or was involved in press announcements between Nov. 5-9 that were without authorization of the Board or contrary to its instructions.

On Nov. 9, Dr. Spanier asked the Board for a vote of confidence. Since for the reasons cited above we were unable to provide it, we voted that evening unanimously to remove him as president and informed him of that decision. Dr. Spanier remains a tenured professor at Penn State.

Coach Joe Paterno

Also on Nov. 9, the Board unanimously made the decision to remove Coach Paterno for the last three games of the season. He had announced earlier that day that he would be retiring at the end of the season.
Our most important reason – by far – for this difficult decision flowed from what we learned on Nov. 5, for the first time, from a “presentment” (report) by a Pennsylvania Grand Jury about Coach Paterno’s early 2011 sworn testimony.

The report stated that a Penn State graduate assistant had gone to Coach Paterno’s home on Saturday morning, March 2, 2002. The report quoted Coach Paterno as testifying to the Grand Jury that the graduate assistant told him that he had seen Jerry Sandusky, the coach's former assistant coach up to 1999, "in the Lasch Building showers fondling or doing something of a sexual nature to a young boy."

While Coach Paterno did his legal duty by reporting that information the next day, Sunday, March 3, to his immediate superior, the then Penn State Athletic Director Tim Curley, the Board reasonably inferred that he did not call police. We determined that his decision to do his minimum legal duty and not to do more to follow up constituted a failure of leadership by Coach Paterno.

The Board spent hours on conference calls between Saturday, Nov. 5, and Tuesday, Nov. 8, discussing appropriate action and our fiduciary responsibility as the Trustees. On Wednesday evening, Nov. 9, we met in person in State College. At about 9 pm, we unanimously made the difficult decision that Coach Paterno’s failure of leadership required his removal as football coach.

We are sorry for the unfortunate way we had to deliver the news on the telephone about an hour later to Coach Paterno. However, we saw no better alternative. Because Coach Paterno’s home was surrounded by media representatives, photographers and others, we did not believe there was a dignified, private and secure way to send Board representatives to meet with him there. Nor did we believe it would be wise to wait until the next morning, since we believed it was probable that Coach Paterno would hear the news beforehand from other sources, which would be inappropriate.

Thus, we sent a representative of the Athletic Department to ask Coach Paterno to call us. When the coach called, the Board member who received the call planned to tell him that (1) the Board had decided unanimously to remove him as coach; (2) the Board regretted having to deliver the message over the telephone; and (3) his employment contract would continue, including all financial benefits and his continued status as a tenured faculty member. However, after this Board member communicated the first message, Coach Paterno ended the call, so the second and third messages could not be delivered.

Many alumni, faculty, staff and students are inquiring about how we plan to honor Coach Paterno’s many contributions to the University. It has always been the Board’s intention to fulfill his employment contract and to name him head coach emeritus. Other options also are under consideration, but the Board feels it would be premature to make any final decision at least until
the final report of the independent counsel Judge Louis Freeh is publicly issued in conjunction with the Special Investigations Task Force.

**Remembering the Children**

We remain committed to remembering the children who were allegedly assaulted over the last 10 or more years, many on Penn State’s University Park campus, and whose lives may well be scarred for years to come. The University has offered and will provide counseling and related health care services. We have contributed financially to organizations dedicated to protecting victims of sexual assault and child abuse.

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, joined by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, have agreed to join with the University to co-sponsor a national forum at Penn State on child sexual abuse. We plan to invite representatives from our 24 campuses, as well as from other Pennsylvania colleges and universities. We hope to turn this tragedy into an important teaching moment. We hope such a forum would bring together the nation’s experts to inform all on recognizing early signs of child sexual abuse, the long-term effects on child sexual assault victims, and the legal and ethical responsibility to report even suspicions of such abuse.

As one member of the Board of Trustees, Ken Frazier, put it so well:

“…. [E]very adult has a responsibility for every child in our community. And …we have a responsibility not to do the minimum, the legal requirement. We have a responsibility for ensuring that we can make every effort that’s within our power not only to prevent further harm to that one child, but to every child.”

That is our commitment to the children…and to the core values that have always made Penn State a great university.
## Appendix D

### Crisis Communications Physical Questionnaire

**Crisis Preparedness Questions for Your Next Management Meeting**

Grade on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being non-existent and 10 being excellent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What kind of management notification system do we have in place if a</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>crisis occurs during non-business hours?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How long would it take to reach everyone on the management committee if</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>we had a crisis at 3 p.m. on a Saturday afternoon?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What is our Corporate Emergency Response Plan?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When was it last updated?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has it ever been tested or used to determine if it works?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How well does it tie in with the response plans of our other facilities?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What internal problems or other vulnerabilities do we have that could</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be damaging to our business if they went public?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What would be the public reaction if a problem was disclosed by a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disgruntled employee, or in a stockholder lawsuit, government</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>investigation or an investigative news report?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How would we explain or justify the situation so it would have the</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>least business and financial impact?</td>
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<tr>
<td>And what is being done to minimize the chances of that problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occurring?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. What kind of an early warning system do we have for detecting and</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>analyzing those potential crises while they are still just problems?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What kind of informal mechanism do we have to uncover smoldering</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>crises from our sales force, personnel at other facilities, HR</td>
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<tr>
<td>department and/or legal counsel?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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5 – Who would be our spokesperson(s) in a crisis situation and how good would they be in handling tough questions from reporters?

   What if the crisis is at one of our other facilities and the media move in to cover it?
   Regardless of where it happens, how much confidence do we have that our spokesperson(s) would be credible and convincing?

   Grade on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being non-existent and 10 being excellent

   1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

6 – How much information would we give out if we had a crisis?

   Who would decide what to say?
   What would be the approval process and how long would it take to get the information okayed?

   Grade on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being non-existent and 10 being excellent

   1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

7 – How would we contact our management and employees so they would hear from us before learning about the crisis from the news media?

   How about our customers, suppliers and other key audiences? How could we do it and how long will it take to contact these people?

   Grade on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being non-existent and 10 being excellent

   1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

8 – What crisis situations that went public have similar organizations had in the past year?

   How well would we have handled those crises?

   Grade on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being non-existent and 10 being excellent

   1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

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REFERENCES


ACADEMIC VITA

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Education

B.S., Marketing, 2013, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA
B.A., Print Journalism, 2013, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA
Minor, International Business, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA
Study Abroad, Economics of European Integration, Maastricht University, The Netherlands

Honors and Awards

• Kappa Tau Alpha National Honor Society, College of Communications, Spring 2013
• S.W. Calkins Memorial Award, College of Communications, Fall 2012 – Spring 2013
• Norman C. and Mollie Miller Journalism Scholarship, College of Communications, Fall 2012 – Spring 2013
• Schreyer Ambassador Travel Grant, Schreyer Honors College, Summer 2012
• Education Abroad Scholarship, Maastricht University, Summer 2012
• Student Leadership Scholarship, Penn State, Fall 2011
• Dean’s List, Penn State, Spring 2010 – Spring 2013
• Academic Excellence Award, Schreyer Honors College, Fall 2009 – Spring 2013

Activities

• President (2011-2012) and Social Chair (2010-2011) of the Schreyer Honors College Student Council
• Public Relations Chair (2011-2012) and Project Analyst (Spring 2011) of the Penn State Marketing Association
• College Staff Writer (2011-2012) for the Next Generation Journal
• Arts Blogger (Fall 2011) for WPSU’s Blue Robot
• Member of 3rd Place team at the USC Marshall International Case Competition (Spring 2013)

Professional Experience

• Altria Group, Inc., Brand Management Intern (Summer 2012)
• Penn State Undergraduate Admissions Office, Social Media Intern (Fall 2011)
• Wishberry, LLC, Marketing Intern (Fall 2011)

Future Employer

• Unilever, Assistant Brand Manager