

*Essays*

## **In the Event of an Emergency: Crisis Management for WPAs**

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### ABSTRACT

*In this article, I argue that WPAs must proactively engage in a crisis management process to create crisis-ready writing programs. Crises disrupt the typical writing program work, so WPAs must be prepared to collaborate with existing campus-crisis response plans and develop their own programmatic crisis management plans. Drawing on my experience as a WPA after an off-campus mass shooting and a global pandemic, I present a process that WPAs can use to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from crisis events. This crisis management process will help WPAs create writing programs that are more attentive to writing program stakeholders' changing educational and socio-emotional needs after a crisis so that the work of teaching and learning about writing can resume as quickly and safely as possible.*

### INTRODUCTION

Since Spring 2020 all WPAs have acted as crisis managers, a role that is not typically part of our professional training but that nonetheless is familiar to many WPAs. The COVID-19 global pandemic has caused over 681,341 deaths in the United States<sup>1</sup> with other significant effects including increased rates of unemployment, homelessness, and food insecurity, and decreased access to social support resources for medical care, mental health support, and childcare. The pandemic's effects have disparately impacted Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities (García de Müeller et al., 2020). In addition to the pandemic, the unprosecuted murders of Black people by police have prompted national mass demonstrations to protest extrajudicial killing and to advocate for immediate antiracist and racial justice actions. These two concurrent crises have disrupted business as usual, and the crisis effects will shape higher education for years to come.

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1. As of September 23, 2021, according to the *New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/covid-cases.html>).

WPAs have responded to the national crisis context through administrative, curricular, and pedagogical means. WPAs mobilized to shift instruction online, to adapt course curricula and pedagogical strategies, to troubleshoot technology and basic needs access for instructors and students, and to address racism in writing programs. Our professional response has required intense mental and emotional labor as we support instructors and students without the necessary information, time, and resources while also attending to our own personal precarity during an unprecedented global health, economic, and social crisis. This labor is exacerbated for Black WPAs and WPAs of color who must also contend with the dehumanizing effects of white supremacy and racism (Carter-Tod, 2020; Craig & Perryman-Clark, 2011, 2016; Kynard, 2019).

The global pandemic, widespread racial justice protests, and political unrest present an unusual moment of extreme crisis response for WPAs, who are experienced at managing smaller-scale professional crises. During more typical times, the discipline faces crises like the increase in exploitative labor practices and the perceived literacy crisis. In our local writing programs, we respond to budget, staffing, scheduling, enrollment, student, or instructor crises. But these are not the only crises that impact writing programs. Natural disasters, student or instructor deaths, campus shootings, and, more recently, pandemics, protests, and political coups are only some crisis situations that can disrupt the writing program's mission of teaching and learning about writing. WPAs respond to these less frequent crises, often without the appropriate training or procedures to ensure that we respond efficiently, effectively, and safely.

I quickly learned about the WPA's role in crisis management when the 1 October shooting took place three months after I started my WPA job at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). As WPA, I located writing program staff and faculty, shared institutional communications, identified campus and community resources, adjusted course curriculum, offered pedagogical accommodations, and supported instructors and students. None of my actions in the shooting aftermath were part of my job description, nor had I received any crisis training. My actions after the shooting were informed by my previous experiences with violence in educational settings. I have sheltered in place during lock-downs on every campus where I have studied and worked. I learned that a crisis can occur at any moment, and this knowledge has shaped my professional identity as a writing instructor and now a WPA. My personal history prepared me to act quickly after the Las Vegas shooting and more recently during the COVID-19 pandemic, but still I needed more preparation to support students, faculty, and myself during crisis situations.

Crisis management may not seem like a WPA's responsibility, especially when WPAs already have so much work related to our disciplinary expertise. Crisis management is not mentioned in the job categories presented in *The Portland Resolution* (Hult et al., 1992) or recognized as our professional intellectual labor (CWPA, 2019). Even though crisis management does not appear in our written position descriptions, WPAs are called to act as programmatic first responders in the event of an emergency (Clinnin, 2020). During a crisis, WPAs must transform an institution's emergency response efforts into practical writing program and classroom applications. The WPA's logistical, intellectual, and emotional labor is exacerbated by the lack of safety and stability. WPAs can reduce the mental and emotional burden of crisis response by proactively practicing crisis management so that in the event of an emergency we can respond efficiently, effectively, and safely on behalf of the writing program without neglecting our own care.

In this article, I demonstrate how WPAs can engage in the crisis management process to create crisis-ready writing programs. I introduce educational crisis management scholarship to define and identify writing program crises. Based on this scholarship and my crisis experience, I present a process that WPAs can use to prepare for, respond to, and recover from crisis situations. My hope is that this article will help WPAs practice crisis management to create writing programs that are safe and secure spaces for teaching and learning. And in the unfortunate event that a crisis has already occurred, the crisis evaluation process presented here can guide the WPA's immediate response and ongoing recovery efforts to support students, faculty, and administrators while also prioritizing the WPA's own well-being.

#### CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Educators are increasingly responsible for crisis management due to the frequency of natural and human-caused crises; it is not a question *if* a crisis situation will occur but *when* (Cowan & Rossen, 2013, p. 8). In this section, I review educational crisis management scholarship and identify potential writing program crises. I then discuss ways that WPAs can collaborate with existing campus crisis management initiatives as a starting point for writing program crisis management.

The first step to creating a crisis-ready writing program is differentiating writing program crises from challenges. WPAs frequently encounter challenges and less frequently experience crises. Challenges and crises require different labor to respond appropriately and safely. Failure to differentiate a challenge from a crisis may lead to overreactions or inadequate responses with unintended consequences. For example, approaching all challenges

as crises may put WPAs at risk of emotional burnout, which is already an occupational hazard present in many WPA narratives (Dardello, 2019; George, 1999; Keaton Jackson, 2018), whereas responding to crisis situations without proper training and procedures may result in insufficient responses that risk safety and security (Kerr, 2009; Knox & Roberts, 2005).

Crisis management scholarship defines a crisis as an event “that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, its existential core” (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992, p. 15). Crises are extraordinary situations with widespread physical and emotional impacts that require unusual practical and emotional labor to manage the situation (Zdziarski, 2007), whereas challenges are more limited in severity and scale. Many crises are beyond the WPA’s professional responsibilities and abilities to manage, so instead WPAs should focus on educational crises, which are events on or off-campus that impact the institution, students, and faculty (Kerr, 2009). Educational crises disrupt the typical work of teaching and learning and cause physical, mental, and emotional distress for students and faculty. By limiting their concern to educational crises, WPAs do not need to respond to all crises but can focus their attention on the crises most likely to impact the writing program.

Next, WPAs should familiarize themselves with the existing educational crisis management strategies on their campus. The goal of educational crisis management is to ensure the immediate safety and security of students, faculty, and staff and to address long-term physical, logistical, mental, and emotional needs (Demaria & Schonfeld, 2013). As illustrated in figure 1, educational crisis management is an iterative process of prevention, preparation, response, and recovery (Cowan & Rossen, 2013). Prevention and preparation practices occur before a crisis. Prevention facilitates a safe and positive learning environment to reduce the likelihood of an avoidable crisis. Preparation establishes procedures for potential crises events and trains personnel to implement these procedures. Response occurs during a crisis situation to mitigate harm and re-establish physical safety and security. Finally, recovery is the ongoing effort to re-establish normalcy by attending to impacted individuals’ short- and long-term physical, emotional, and material needs.



Figure 1. Higher education crisis management process and actions

Although educational institutions are federally-required to practice crisis management, campus efforts often fail to include writing program professionals or address crisis management within writing programs. Campus crisis-response training is typically mandated only for student affairs professionals and administrators. Academic faculty are unlikely to receive crisis management training, which can risk instructors' and students' safety during a crisis. Writing program instructors may be unaware of existing campus crisis procedures or how to access available crisis training. Furthermore, campus crisis plans often focus on campus-wide efforts to re-establish safety and limit physical harm rather than individual actions. Campus crisis plans do not address how WPAs and writing instructors can practice prevention, preparation, response, and recovery actions within their roles, leaving individuals to determine appropriate actions during a crisis.

To ensure the safety of administrators, instructors, and students, writing programs need their own crisis management practices that supplement existing campus crisis management protocols. WPAs can establish crisis-ready writing programs by collaborating with existing campus crisis management providers and then developing writing program crisis practices that address crisis prevention, preparation, response, and recovery. Engaging in this crisis-management process will help WPAs establish the writing

program as a positive educational environment that may prevent potential crises and help re-establish learning after a crisis. These proactive steps will make the WPA position more sustainable in a crisis by reducing some of the practical, mental, and emotional labor.

#### PREVENTING CRISES BY ESTABLISHING POSITIVE WRITING PROGRAM CLIMATES

The crisis management process begins with prevention to establish a positive educational climate that meet students and professionals' social, mental, and emotional needs. A positive educational climate is characterized by healthy relationships among school personnel, students, and their families; teachers and staff trained to recognize and respond to emotional distress in students; and access to mental health resources (Cowan & Rossen, 2013; Kerr, 2009). A positive educational climate cannot eliminate all potential crisis situations, but it can facilitate more effective crisis response and recovery because school personnel will be prepared to meet students' changing safety, social, emotional, and academic needs. However, school personnels' socioemotional needs must also be met for personnel to address students' needs after a crisis (Devine, 2007). School personnels' needs warrant special consideration given the high rates of teacher attrition attributed to high-stress working environments (Brasfield, Lancaster, & Xu, 2019) and the emotional labor associated with teaching, which contributes to burn-out, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma (Skovholt, 2016). School administrators can mitigate some of this professional stress by recognizing emotional and mental wellness issues in the workplace and creating structures that support holistic wellness (Brasfield, Lancaster, & Xu; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Establishing a positive educational environment before a crisis provides students and personnel with the socioemotional support needed for recovery.

Although the research connecting a positive educational climate to crisis management has emerged from K-12 settings, WPAs can apply these findings to create positive writing program climates. A positive writing program climate recognizes emotional labor and values self-care. One strategy to create a healthy writing program climate is to encourage program personnel to develop self-care plans to maintain their mental, emotional, and physical wellness. Individuals in high-stress occupations like emergency first responders who use self-care plans are less likely to suffer from professional burnout and more likely to respond to workplace stress appropriately (Mastracci, Guy, & Newman, 2012). Although writing professionals' labor differs from that of emergency responders', even under normal working

conditions writing professionals are at-risk of professional burnout and can benefit from practices like self-care plans. Self-care practices become even more important during a crisis as the typical emotional labor of college writing instructors and administrators substantially increases (Borrowman, 2005; DeBacher & Harris-Moore, 2016; Hodges Hamilton, 2016). Self-care can be incorporated into ongoing writing program professional development through discussions of the emotional dimension of our work and the importance of self-care. Discussing self-care does not eradicate structural issues that exacerbate faculty stress and burnout, but it can help to establish the writing program as a professional space where we care about students *and* instructors' well-being.

Writing professionals can create more positive educational climates by training in psychological first aid to support students' mental health. Psychological first aid helps instructors recognize students' social, emotional, and mental needs and connect students to relevant resources (Ready.gov, n.d.). College writing instructors may not learn about students' physical, mental, social, and emotional development as part of their professional training, so psychological first aid training can benefit students and instructors. Psychological first aid can help instructors address common mental health concerns that may appear in student interactions or writing, and in a crisis, the same psychological first aid techniques will help instructors respond appropriately to students' needs. WPAs can offer psychological first aid training as an ongoing professional development opportunity. Psychological first aid training is available through national organizations, but even collaborating with the local counseling center to facilitate a conversation about students' mental, social, and emotional needs and to compile local resources can help instructors better support students at all times.

Writing program prevention actions thus include

- Recognizing emotional labor as part of administrative and instructional labor
- Discussing emotional labor during program professional development and meetings
- Encouraging instructors and WPAs to practice self-care
- Offering psychological first aid training for instructors and administrators to assist students

## PREPARING FOR CRISIS BY DEVELOPING PROGRAM CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLANS

While crisis prevention attempts to stop a crisis from occurring by establishing a positive educational climate, crisis preparation ensures that all stakeholders have the necessary knowledge and skills to respond quickly, effectively, and safely in a crisis. WPAs can initiate crisis preparation by creating crisis management plans and educating program faculty on their responsibilities during a crisis.

Writing program crisis preparation begins with learning about existing campus crisis response personnel and plans. Institutions are federally mandated to develop and routinely review campus crisis response plans. These plans provide “clarity and consistency in how the campus addresses a crisis” and reduce “confusion or debate on key issues that might arise in the heat of the moment” (Zdziarski, 2007, p. 74). The campus crisis response plan provides instructions to address potential emergencies like fires, hazardous material spills, medical emergencies, and even elevator malfunctions. As noted in the prevention stage, WPAs should review the campus crisis-response plans and share these plans with program instructors so that all writing program personnel can follow local crisis procedures.

Campus crisis response plans present procedures to re-establish physical safety and security during various crises, but there are some limitations that require WPAs to develop supplemental writing program crisis response plans to guide programmatic actions during a crisis. Campus response plans address crises that impact the safety and security of campus or that require assistance from local authorities, but these plans do not address all potential disruptive events or include all university personnel. The campus response plans may not address smaller-scale crises such as the death of an instructor, or administrators may decide that a crisis does not warrant a campus response. Furthermore, crisis response plans do not involve all university personnel who may need to act in crisis situations. The intended audience for most campus crisis response plans are the emergency professionals responsible for decision making, coordinating efforts, and communicating information during a crisis. Campus crisis response plans are not designed for non-emergency campus professionals like WPAs and instructors, and as a result, the crisis response plans do not address non-emergency crisis response actions. However, non-emergency professionals must still make decisions during crises about if and how to carry out their professional responsibilities. For example, without guidance from the campus crisis response team, writing instructors must decide whether to hold class or how to accommodate students’ learning needs during a crisis. WPAs can

address these gaps by creating supplemental writing program crisis management plans that can guide writing program faculty's actions during a crisis.

The process of creating a writing program crisis management plan begins with anticipating the crises that are most likely to disrupt the writing program's teaching and learning mission and proactively establishing response and recovery actions. A writing program crisis management plan establishes procedures that ensure the safety and security of students and instructors, the effective communication of information, and the necessary support during and after a crisis event. Proactively developing a writing program crisis management plan relieves some of the logistical labor and emotional burden that WPAs may experience during a crisis. In my own experience after the 1 October shooting, I was overwhelmed by the responsibility of making programmatic decisions and guiding instructors while also processing my own emotional reaction to the shooting, a reaction made more complicated by my previous experiences with gun and campus violence. After the shooting, I developed writing program crisis materials for future use. I was able to adapt these materials in Spring 2020 as part of the writing program COVID-19 response, which reduced my own cognitive and emotional labor amidst a global crisis.

Developing a writing program crisis management plan is a multi-step process<sup>2</sup>. First, WPAs should familiarize themselves with campus crisis personnel and procedures. WPAs can collaborate with campus crisis personnel while developing the writing program crisis management plan to ensure the plan aligns with campus emergency management efforts and complies with legal mandates. After reviewing existing plans, WPAs can identify likely writing program crises that may not be covered by the institution's broader crisis response measures. Some disruptive events may include the death of a student or instructor, campus protests, hate speech, and campus violence. WPAs can imagine the potential effects of each crisis situation by answering the following questions:

- Who/what is involved (students, faculty, administrators, classroom spaces, etc.)?
- What impact does the crisis have on those involved (physical, mental, emotional, pedagogical, infrastructural, etc.)?
- What will those involved need in the short-term to feel safe and secure?
- What will those involved need in the long-term to return to normalcy?

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2. A writing program crisis management plan template is available at <https://bit.ly/wpacmplan> for those readers who would like to create a plan for their own writing program.

- How can the writing program respond to these needs?

The answers to these questions provide the foundation of a writing program crisis management plan.

Once the WPA has identified possible crises, they can develop writing program crisis communication and response procedures. Crisis communication protocols identify who will communicate information to writing program personnel. Other campus offices may handle crisis communication due to federal guidelines for student privacy (FERPA) and timely notification of safety risks (the Clery Act), so WPAs should communicate specific information about the writing program's administrative, pedagogical, and curricular response actions, which are discussed more later in this article. WPAs can also share campus and local resources that can provide support during and after crises. Although each crisis event will require WPAs to analyze the situation for specific impacts and necessary actions, this proactive process of crisis analysis and preparation will help WPAs safely and efficiently address stakeholders' needs during a crisis.

A writing program crisis management plan is only as effective as the training provided to writing program personnel to use the plan and to act accordingly. Instructors recognize their lack of training for crisis situations (Borrowman, 2005; DeBacher & Harris-Moore, 2016). Training can help WPAs and instructors feel more confident in their ability to act swiftly and safely should a crisis ever occur (Brock et al., 2016). This training may be provided through in-person workshops, online modules, or compiled resources. Training events are opportunities for WPAs to collaborate with other campus and community entities on writing programs crisis preparation. Collaborative training events help campus offices understand writing program work so that they can better support instructors and students, and these events also help instructors understand their crisis management role. For example, campus emergency services may lead a training session on fire and evacuation procedures in the classroom buildings most frequently used by writing courses, or the counseling center can suggest discussion facilitation strategies for emotional topics. At my institution, I have addressed the immediate need for more crisis training by compiling resources for instructors including a handout from our counseling services about working with students in distress, a script for leading class after crisis events, and contact information for campus resources that provide emergency, counseling, and legal services. The resources are available on a program resource site so that instructors can access information at any time, and I also share these resources with program instructors as needed after a crisis. In the long-term, I plan to incorporate a crisis management session in our yearly orientation

for program instructors and as a class session in the required practicum course for new graduate teaching instructors. These are low-effort ways to provide instructors with important training that can reduce their logistical, pedagogical, and emotional labor during a crisis situation without adding more uncompensated labor to their already excessive workload.

Writing program preparation actions thus include

- Familiarizing yourself with your institution's campus crisis-response team and plan
- Developing a writing program crisis management plan that aligns with the institutional crisis management process
- Maintaining updated contact information for all writing program instructors
- Compiling relevant crisis resources for instructors
- Providing training to instructors on possible writing program crisis situations

#### RESPONDING TO CRISIS BY EVALUATING AND ACTING

Building on prevention and preparation, crisis response directly addresses the crisis situation to re-establish safety and security. In any crisis situation, the WPA's first responsibility is to follow the existing campus crisis management plan and instructions provided by campus or local authorities. However, these campus-wide plans and directions will not address all of the concerns of writing program stakeholders, so WPAs must supplement campus crisis response by providing writing program crisis response. Ideally, WPAs will follow the existing crisis management plan developed during crisis preparation and make necessary adjustments to respond to the specific crisis. In the following section, I suggest ways that WPAs can evaluate crises and take safe, effective, efficient, and role-appropriate actions.

Writing program crisis response begins by evaluating the crisis' scope and effects to determine an appropriate response. Crisis responders evaluate situations according to type, level, stakeholders, and effects (Zdziarski, 2007), and WPAs can use the categories presented in figure 2 to evaluate writing program crises. Type identifies the crisis' cause, which may be environmental, logistical, or human. Level refers to the crisis' scale and can range from the relatively-small scale like a classroom to an entire institution or a local community. Stakeholders are those who are directly or indirectly impacted by the crisis event. Effects are the short- and long-term impacts from the crisis.

<p><b>Type: cause of crisis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental: natural disasters</li> <li>• Logistical: infrastructure, technology issues</li> <li>• Human: medical emergencies, criminal activities, public health</li> </ul>	<p><b>Level: scale of crisis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom</li> <li>• Writing program</li> <li>• Institutional</li> <li>• Local, regional, global</li> </ul>
<p><b>Crisis Evaluation Matrix</b></p>	
<p><b>Stakeholders: those directly or indirectly affected</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing program students or instructors</li> <li>• Institution members</li> <li>• Community members</li> </ul>	<p><b>Effects: results of crisis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical: physical harm</li> <li>• Emotional: stress, depression, anxiety</li> <li>• Material: homelessness, food insecurity, economic insecurity</li> <li>• Pedagogical: changed learning needs and access to materials, curricular and pedagogical adjustments</li> </ul>

Figure 2. WPA Crisis Evaluation Matrix

Although it is impossible to anticipate all aspects of a crisis, the crisis evaluation process can help WPAs systemically analyze what is often a confusing and chaotic situation to guide their actions during crisis management.

In addition to the existing crisis evaluation categories, WPAs should also consider agency, or their ability to respond to a crisis. The WPA's agency may be constrained by the crisis context and other institutional actors. Crisis response highlights the WPA's liminal position within the institution; there are some crises for which WPAs are primarily responsible because the crisis impacts only the writing program or there is no institutional response, but in other situations there may be a unified campus crisis response. As part of their crisis analysis process, WPAs should evaluate their agency by identifying the other institutional actors that may make decisions that affect the writing program. During a crisis, WPAs may need to wait for these institutional actors to provide instructions or policies before the WPA can proceed with writing program crisis response.

To demonstrate how WPAs can use the crisis evaluation matrix, I present my evaluation process to determine my program's COVID-19 response in March 2020. COVID-19 is a multifaceted crisis that WPAs cannot respond to completely, but we can treat the pandemic as an educational crisis to evaluate its effects on students and instructors in the writing program to determine appropriate programmatic responses. The crisis type was an ongoing human, public health crisis. The crisis level was global, but by reframing the pandemic as an educational crisis, I focused on the writing program and writing classrooms. The primary crisis stakeholders within the writing program were the 5,000 students enrolled in writing courses and

100 contingent instructors teaching in Spring 2020. Each of these stakeholders experienced different effects from the pandemic. All stakeholders had a potential physical impact; anyone could be exposed to COVID-19 or test positive, although some individuals were at greater risk due to their health history. Basic needs could not be assumed as many individuals faced increased housing, food, and economic insecurity. Stakeholders experienced ranging emotional effects including grief, trauma, anger, depression, burnout, and fatigue as the pandemic continued. The pandemic disrupted any sense of safety and security, and the campus closed as a public health precaution. All students and instructors needed information about how the spring semester would continue. Although the university announced the physical closure of campus, this institutional response did not address all concerns. Instructors needed to “pivot” their classes to emergency remote instruction, and students needed to adapt to an entirely online course-load. Not all instructors or students had access to computers, Internet, course materials, or suitable workspaces off-campus. In addition to the emotional and material concerns, writing program instructors needed pedagogical guidance. A majority of the instructors had never taught online before, so the shift to emergency remote instruction with only one week of preparation presented a significant technological and curricular challenge. Finally, my agency in this crisis was constrained. I did not have the authority to move all writing courses to a remote format until the institution closed campus, and writing program policies regarding instructor and student health, technology access, and course grades needed to align with still-developing institutional policies. I did have the agency to respond to stakeholders’ needs by offering logistical, curricular, and pedagogical support.

After evaluating the crisis, WPAs will be in a better position to decide how to respond safely, effectively, and efficiently, often in collaboration with other campus entities. For example, WPAs may need to work with campus offices to relocate classroom spaces, find new instructors for short or long-term need, adjust program policies for adding, dropping, or withdrawing from courses, and adjust to any university changes to the academic calendar. WPAs may also need to communicate information from campus crisis management personnel to program instructors. Although campus authorities communicate information to campus members, these messages may be generic and unable to address instructors’ immediate concerns. In a study of contingent faculty teaching after Hurricane Sandy, Carl Schlachte found that instructors wanted more guidance from the writing program; the absence of program directives meant that most of the instructors felt that they did not know how to respond to the natural disaster appropriately or did not feel authorized to make changes to their classes (2020). With

Schlachte's findings in mind, WPAs can approach crisis communication as an opportunity to provide specific information and support to writing instructors. WPAs can establish the tone for crisis response by recognizing the crisis situation, validating the experience and response that individuals may have to the crisis, conveying accurate information as needed, providing clear instructions for instructors' roles and responsibilities, and sharing resources (Demaria & Schonfeld, 2013). WPAs can suggest appropriate pedagogical responses or authorize instructors to be flexible. Pedagogical response may range from course-management issues like modifying course curriculum or adjusting attendance policies and deadlines to student support concerns like working with distressed students and facilitating class discussions after a crisis. WPA crisis response should help program stakeholders understand their responsibilities, access relevant resources, and feel supported during an uncertain time.

My response in March 2020 to the COVID-19 pandemic focused on providing logistical and pedagogical information to instructors. Like all crisis management situations, leading the writing program pandemic response was intellectually, emotionally, and physically exhausting, compounded by the fact that I was nine months pregnant. My physical vulnerability heightened my perceived risk to students and instructors if in-person instruction continued. My impending leave accelerated the need to initiate writing program crisis response procedures for the immediate crisis situation (an anticipated fast move to remote instruction) and future effects such as fall scheduling changes. My administrative labor was reduced because I had already developed crisis response procedures and resources that I could adapt for this context. At the time it was unclear whether the university would continue in-person instruction or shift to remote, so I created contingency plans for both scenarios. I drafted a COVID-19 plan for the writing program administrative team that established our process for supporting instructors and students whether instruction continued in-person or online; the internal plan helped us collaboratively address the aspects within our control, identify gaps in instructor and student support that we could rectify, delegate responsibilities, and ensure continuity in our writing program operations. A major concern was how to ensure instructional continuity regardless of the university's decision about delivery format. I created a pedagogical guide that presented ways instructors could quickly adapt their classes for emergency remote instruction. The guide was by no means comprehensive, but it provided instructors with clear priorities and manageable actions that they could take to move their class online. Our writing program team was especially concerned about how the shift to remote instruction would impact our entirely contingent instructor population

and drastically increase their workload while they also dealt with personal pandemic effects. We surveyed our instructor population about their ability to teach remotely and what they needed to do so successfully. We created extensive curricular materials such as modified course schedules, online course content, and course shells for the learning management system so that instructors could use these materials as a starting point for their now-remote class. Our team hosted several drop-in help sessions for instructors to ask questions about teaching remotely, to receive individual technical help, and to maintain human connection during social isolation. I also provided several resources about teaching during a crisis, trauma-informed pedagogy, self-care, and a list of campus and local resources for emergency financial support, food insecurity, homelessness, mental health support, and health care access.

Our writing program response did not eradicate all of the damage and trauma from the COVID-19 crisis, but our response did ease some of the burden for our instructors and students. Instructors shared that they felt personally and professionally supported by our comprehensive writing program. Our response to this crisis and all of the procedures, documents, and resources that we have created and compiled will inform our future crisis response. We have continued to re-evaluate the crisis and our stakeholder needs so that we can effectively respond as the pandemic context changes, and, eventually, begin the recovery process.

Writing program response actions thus include

- Analyzing the crisis event according to type, level, stakeholders, and effects to determine appropriate response
- Recognizing the limits and possibilities of your ability to respond to the crisis
- Collaborating with other campus offices as needed
- Communicating usable, relevant information to writing program stakeholders
- Re-evaluating the ongoing situation to identify kairotic response actions

#### RECOVERING FROM CRISIS BY SUPPORTING AND ACCOMMODATING

Crisis recovery is the ongoing process of returning to normalcy and usual functions after the crisis event is resolved (Cowan & Rossen, 2013). Recovery builds on response activities by extending these efforts into the future. During the recovery stage, writing program stakeholders return to the educational setting and re-start the work of teaching and learning about writing, but long-term crisis effects may continue to impact this work. WPAs

can be prepared to assist in the recovery process by attending to students' and instructors' ongoing mental, emotional, and pedagogical needs.

Mental and emotional wellness are major considerations during crisis recovery as impacted individuals must heal from the crisis event and resume daily routines. The proactive strategies from the crisis prevention stage that establish an emotionally healthy educational environment for students and personnel are foundational to crisis recovery. After a crisis, strategies such as continued use of self-care plans can aid in the mental and emotional recovery process. However, the same preventative strategies used before a crisis may no longer be as effective due to trauma caused by crises, so additional recovery tools may be needed to address impacted individuals' new mental and emotional needs. One such tool is episodic critical incident stress management. First-responders use critical incident stress (CIS) debriefings facilitated by a counselor to process crisis events, which involve discussing their professional actions in the crisis and sharing their emotional reactions (Mastracci, Guy, & Newman, 2012). CIS debriefings are opportunities for personnel to discuss the effectiveness of procedures and their actions and to suggest revisions to procedures or practices for future scenarios. CIS debriefings also destigmatize the emotional dimensions of work. During these sessions, personnel discuss their emotional responses to the crisis event and develop effective coping mechanisms that may reduce burnout and vicarious trauma (43). Although writing program stakeholders are unlikely to experience the same trauma as emergency first responders, collaborating with local counseling resources to facilitate a similar discussion after a crisis can benefit writing program stakeholders' recovery process. If campus or community resources are unavailable, even sharing information about stress reactions to trauma may help writing program personnel be more likely to recognize their own emotional responses, to seek help if needed, and to direct others to available resources.

Instructors will also need to support students through the crisis recovery process by engaging in pedagogical recovery practices that can accommodate students' changing educational needs. After a crisis, students may have difficulty focusing, retaining course material, and attending class regularly (Davidson, 2017; Sitler, 2009). They may express out-of-character emotions like anxiety, fear, and anger, or they may isolate themselves (Davidson, 2017; Sitler, 2009). Writing program instructors who are prepared to provide psychological first aid can recognize these signs and support student recovery by helping students access needed resources and adapting the learning environment as necessary. Trauma-informed pedagogy suggests that instructors empower students by allowing them to make decisions about their learning so that they feel a sense of control and agency (Davidson, 2017). For

example, allowing students to make decisions about project deadlines is a small way that students can control part of their lives without abandoning the structure that is needed after a crisis event. It may also be appropriate to review course content and assignments, and, if necessary, to provide content warnings or alternative assignments so that students who may be distressed by the content can participate in other ways. While these may seem like small adjustments that align with effective pedagogy at all times, it is important that WPAs present these trauma-informed pedagogical practices to the writing program instructors during the crisis recovery process. Instructors may not feel empowered to make changes to the set curriculum, or they may be unsure about appropriate actions given the crisis. Partly this is a matter of preparing instructors for crisis and trauma-informed pedagogies in advance, but WPAs can mitigate some instructor anxiety by reminding instructors of appropriate classroom accommodations and existing resources to support students during a difficult time.

Providing pedagogical recovery practices was one of my most important contributions as WPA after the 1 October shooting. Instructors required a space to process how the shooting impacted their professional responsibilities and help to determine appropriate short- and long-term classroom responses. To address these needs for emotional support and professional guidance, I organized a critical incident stress debriefing that was well-attended by program graduate teaching assistants and part-time instructors. I requested that two counselors from our university center attend to help instructors process their own response to the shooting and to provide strategies for working with students after a trauma. With the counselors' assistance, I led a discussion about the shooting's impact on our work as writing instructors, including our responsibilities to support students and the limits to the support we could provide in our role. Instructors left the session understanding how to recognize signs of trauma that they and their students may exhibit over the coming weeks, how to adapt their classroom activities to accommodate students' needs, and what resources were available on campus and locally to assist affected individuals. The meeting did not resolve all of the questions or problems about teaching after a mass shooting, but it did initiate a dialogue about these concerns that helped instructors to feel more emotionally supported in the writing program and more confident in their professional response to students' needs after the tragedy. Our program has not yet addressed pedagogical recovery for COVID-19 as we are still actively in the response stage, but when we eventually do begin the recovery process, we will use similar trauma-informed strategies in the program and classrooms.

Writing program recovery actions thus include

- Continuing effective self-care strategies or adopt new self-care practices
- Collaborating with local mental health resources to provide a space for instructors to process their experiences and feelings as related to their professional role
- Offering trauma-informed pedagogical strategies to support student learning after a crisis

## NEXT STEPS TO CREATING CRISIS-READY WRITING PROGRAMS

Throughout this article, I have presented a crisis management process as a way for WPAs to create crisis-ready writing programs. Crisis management is a contextual process that depends on the crisis as well as our own institutional and writing program structures, policies and procedures, personnel, and resources. The proactive process of preventing, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from crisis helps WPAs to learn more about their institutional crisis procedures and the needs of the program instructors and students before and after a crisis. As part of this process, WPAs will determine what crisis management practices are most effective for their program context.

There are many reasons why WPAs may be hesitant to engage in writing program crisis management. WPAs may feel overwhelmed by the labor needed to prepare for a crisis, unprepared by our professional training to manage a crisis, and frightened by the worst possible scenarios. Additionally, crisis management may be distressing for WPAs, particularly Black WPAs, WPAs of color, and WPA with histories of trauma. Crises do not impact everyone equally. Preparing for crisis is a stark reminder of how racism and white supremacy, sexism, ableism, classism, and other entrenched forms of discrimination exacerbate crisis situations for vulnerable communities. Crisis response and recovery resources are unequally distributed, and the relationship between crisis response human resources (police, medical services, mental health practitioners) and the communities they are intended to serve may be fraught. WPAs may find writing program crisis management difficult when they perceive a greater threat to their personal physical, mental, and emotional well-being. These are valid concerns that must be reckoned with as part of crisis management. While eradicating racism and discrimination in crisis management is beyond my capabilities to solve, the process approach to crisis management that I advocate throughout this article can alleviate some of the practical, mental, and emotional burden for WPAs. Crisis management works best as an ongoing, collaborative, programmatic initiative. By establishing crisis management plans in advance, WPAs can work with campus and community resources to develop relationships and

to create equitable crisis response procedures that do not further expose vulnerable communities to more policing, surveillance, or harm. Proactive crisis management is also a worthwhile endeavor for individual WPAs to reduce their own practical, mental, and emotional labor during a crisis; with the writing program response planned in advance, the WPA can prioritize their personal well-being knowing that their professional responsibilities are handled.

Although crisis management is most beneficial when approached as an ongoing process, WPAs can begin the process with small actions that can have big impacts on the writing program's crisis readiness. First, educate yourself about campus policies and emergency personnel. Locate and read the campus emergency response plan. Make a copy easily accessible to instructors through an instructor resource site, a link on the writing program website, physical copies in instructor offices, or in orientation materials. Review these documents periodically to refresh your understanding and to stay updated on any policy changes. Establish relationships with relevant campus support units like campus safety and counseling center. These offices can provide specific information about how writing programs and instructors can better support emergency efforts and students during a potential crisis event, and depending on their own resources, they may be able to provide training for the writing program. And finally, start discussing role-specific crisis management as part of writing program administration and instruction work. Conversations about crisis response should not be limited to single training sessions but instead should be staged regularly. Talking about our professional roles during a crisis naturalizes crisis management so that it is a known professional responsibility that administrators and instructors are prepared for if a crisis does occur. Taking these relatively small actions before a crisis happens will set the foundation for later, more extensive crisis management actions and ultimately can help WPAs, instructors, and students be better prepared and safer in a crisis event.

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