

Report of the
Presidential Commission on
Safety and Security

April 30, 2010

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Introduction

The Northern Virginia Community College Presidential Commission on Safety and Security was formed and charged by President Robert Templin to take stock of the adequacy of the college's current array of resources devoted to making NOVA a safe and secure place for students to take classes and for faculty and staff to work (See Appendix A for Commission charge and Appendix B for Commission membership). The Commission was further asked to identify any areas that needed improvement or additional resources. More specifically, as expressed in the charge:

The Commission should note strengths and weaknesses of existing systems/infrastructure, and it should make recommendations for improvements and augmentation as it determines these are warranted. The work of the Commission should be primarily forward looking, ensuring that lessons learned from the past and best professional practices are used to ensure that NOVA is well positioned in its planning and capacity to respond to any future incidents or conditions that threaten the safety and security of the college community.

Although the time for the Commission to complete its work was less than three months, the group conducted reviews of many aspects of the college's operations that are directly concerned with safety and security. In its review, the Commission consistently took a stakeholder perspective, recognizing that it had much to learn and that the expertise resided with those responsible for specialized college units and projects. At the same time, the Commission understood its responsibility to exercise its judgment about the extent to which multiple units, activities, and projects were adequately resourced and working together for common purpose. Further, the Commission has been particularly alert to the extent to which the totality of elements is successful in conveying to the college community an overall sense of security as well as providing clear guidance about how individuals at the campus level can access information and obtain assistance as needed.

At its request, the Commission received presentations by various college units with responsibility for safety and security, to include NOVA Police; Emergency Planning; Student Mental Health and Behavior; Employee Relations/Human Resources; Information Technology; Safety; Public Information; and Facilities. Also received were presentations about selected technologies and systems, to include classroom locks; electronic card security and access; security camera system; Emergency Alert Warning System; call boxes; and emergency power. Also considered were the role and function of the Emergency Planning Committee; internal process for emergency incident communication and response; role of the business managers; role of the provosts; resources for off-campus locations; and student perspective. Full details about what the Commission learned are provided in the minutes of the Commission meetings, which are included in this report as Appendix C. Copies of the specific presentations and supporting documents received by the Commission are collected in the office of the Executive Vice President and are available there for reference (see Appendix D for the list of presentations to the Commission and additional documents that were received). Those with significant interest in any of these topics are encouraged to review the minutes and supporting documents since they provide a scope of coverage and level of detail not found in this more general report.

The Commission also solicited feedback from the college community through college governance as coordinated by the College Senate, which asked various groups to respond to the basic question: “How can we make NOVA a safer place to work and attend classes?” The feedback has been assembled in a report which provides both a summary review and a campus-by-campus response (Appendix E). The Commission notes that the overall list of identified concerns tracks closely with what the Commission itself considers to be important.

One further major resource for the Commission was the After Incident Review for the shooting that occurred at the Woodbridge Campus on December 8, 2009. Prepared at the request of President Templin by the Director of Emergency Planning, the review concludes that “some aspects [of emergency response] worked well while improvements can, and must be, made to ensure that the highest level of

preparedness is realized”—a view shared by the Commission. The After Incident Review contains a summary list of Lessons Learned as well as a detailed set of Recommendations (Appendix F). The Commission notes that these are useful in identifying specific aspects of college operations that worked well in this incident and other aspects that need attention. At the same time, the Commission believes that the conclusions and recommendations of the earlier report should be revisited by the Emergency Planning Committee in light of the broader set of observations and recommendations made in this report.

Given the time constraints under which it operated, the Commission focused its attention almost completely on those situations identified in the charge “where violence or disruption might be perpetrated by disturbed students, employees, or visitors.” Although there are many other types of emergencies (e.g., severe weather, HAZ-MAT, endangerments to public health) that college units must be prepared to deal with, the Commission did not have the opportunity to give these close attention.

General Findings

The Commission finds that the college is advancing on a number of fronts to make NOVA a safer place for students to attend classes and for faculty and staff to work. Since the tragic events at Virginia Tech in April 2007, NOVA, along with many other institutions of higher education, has taken significant steps to enhance its capabilities for emergency preparedness and responsiveness. At NOVA, these efforts have included the formalization of Emergency Planning; implementation of various communications/alert technologies and protocols; Student Mental Health and Behavior initiative in Student Services; focus on Employee Relations in Human Resources; College Police reorganization and enhanced training; improvements to physical infrastructure; and comprehensive security assessment of the campuses.

Although many basic units and projects are in place to ensure that the college is prepared and capable of responding to emergencies, a persistent set of concerns and

major issues still need to be addressed. These concerns and issues coalesce around three major themes:

1. The college should give priority attention to preventative measures, including providing the tools and training that faculty, staff, and students need to be proactive and protect themselves.
2. In the event that an emergency occurs, those units responsible for emergency response and management must be well prepared and adequately equipped to take rapid and effective action and to provide clear and helpful communication.
3. The college needs to clarify organizational responsibilities and ensure that appropriate communication, consultation, coordination, and collaboration occur among all college units and positions concerned with safety and security.

The Commission notes that many improvements can result from realignment and greater coordination of existing resources—simply doing better with what we already have. At the same time, the college should prudently use available funds to advance key projects and provide additional positions in areas that will result in major enhancements for safety and security. As additional investments are made in staffing and other resources, they should be done with demonstrable outcomes specified and associated metrics identified to assess the extent that the outcomes are achieved over time.

The Commission further notes that its deliberations were premised on the conviction that an appropriate balance can and should be maintained between, on the one hand, ensuring that all reasonable steps are taken to enhance the safety and security of the college community and, on the other hand, seeing that NOVA campuses maintain their distinctive character as open access and collegiate environments.

What follows are specific findings, observations, and recommendations of the Commission related to the three major areas that need focused attention by the college.

Preventative Measures, Tools, and Training

Monitoring and Managing Concerning/Threatening Behavior

- Student Mental Health and Behavior (SMHB) and Human Resources/Employee Relations (HR/ER) play major roles in preventative efforts and threat assessment/behavioral intervention in instances of concerning/threatening behavior: SMHB for students and HR/ER for college employees.
- Both SMHB and HR/ER should be more organizationally aligned with the college's safety and security structure. Together with College Police and Emergency Planning, they should be involved in providing coordinated training, including table-top exercises, to faculty, staff, and students.
- Deans of Students, as the chief student affairs officers of the campuses, play a critical role in seeing that all aspects of student services align in support of the safety and security of the campus community. These include seeing that the Student Code of Conduct is well enforced to maintain a collegiate environment supportive of teaching and learning; working with student leadership to promote strong student involvement in enhancing campus life; and chairing the campus CARE teams as part the overall effort to effectively deal with issues of student mental health and concerning/threatening behavior.
- The CARE team structure and responsibilities should receive full administrative endorsement and support. Members of the college community (faculty, staff, and students) who report concerning/threatening behavior and CARE team members who assess the information should be assured that their actions will be fully supported and defended as needed.
- Case management will be increasingly needed to ensure that situations with high risk students are monitored and that needed resources are brought to bear for behavior intervention. Consideration should be given to assigning appropriately trained counselors to this function. As staffing resources become available, SMHB and counseling should be considered for additional positions. Improved outcomes resulting from additional staffing must be specified and assessed.

Lock Implementation

- Following the Woodbridge incident, Facilities has proceeded with a well-conceived plan for the procurement and installation of locks that will allow all classrooms to be locked from the inside to prevent unwanted intrusion while still allowing doors to be easily opened from the inside to permit easy exit. Plans are underway for special classrooms (e.g., double doors leading to larger lecture halls) as well for extending the locking system to libraries, labs, tutoring centers, and offices. The standardized approach (Sargent Series 10) will also be used for new construction. This effort should continue to receive priority attention and funding.
- Faculty and staff should receive guidance on using the locks as one component of an overall strategy for sheltering in place during certain types of emergency situations.

Electronic Card Security and Door Access Control System

- The CBORD Access control system is currently being installed at two campuses (MEC and Annandale) for perimeter doors. The system has many advantages, allowing police and others to monitor the status and history of use for all doors as well as to remotely lock and unlock any or all doors. Access is controlled individually through student and employee identification cards. The effort should continue to receive priority attention and funding.

Training and Information

- Training and exercises for faculty (full-time and adjunct), staff, and students occur under the direction of Emergency Planning and Management, College Police, Human Resources, Student Mental Health and Behavior, and Business Managers. A more systematic approach should be organized and coordinated through the Emergency Planning Committee and Office of Emergency Planning and Management, in association with the campuses.

- For important information that needs to get to students, faculty should be more routinely requested to communicate it to their classes. Student leadership and peer-to-peer communication are other effective ways to see that important information is effectively disseminated.
- The Safety Officer provides “More ‘Must Know’ Safety One Liners” as a regular feature of *Intercom*. College Police, Emergency Planning and Management, Student Mental Health and Behavior, and other units should also regularly use *Intercom* to publicize their college-wide and campus-specific activities as well as to provide advisories regarding issues of safety and security.

Off-Campus Sites

- Although Business Managers have responsibility for centers and leased space associated with their campuses (see below), College Police do not patrol or respond to calls for service from any of NOVA’s off-site locations. This is primarily due to insufficient staffing to provide such service.
- This creates a significant disconnect for college personnel who see a substantial NOVA administrative presence at such sites but who cannot count on support from College Police.
- Security services are contracted for some off-site locations (Arlington and Reston Centers) while local and federal police provide support for others where NOVA’s presence is usually non-exclusive (present only for the time classes are offered).
- The Director of Emergency Planning and Management, in conjunction with College Police and Business Managers, should see that instructions as to the proper communication channel for emergency situations are made known to faculty, staff, and students at all off-site locations where NOVA offers classes or services. (Note: The College-wide Dispatch Center proposed below could serve as the one number/one call for such sites, thereby reducing much of the potential confusion and uncertainty for stakeholders.)

Emergency Response, Management, and Communications

24/7 College-wide Dispatch Center

- A compelling rationale exists for establishing a college-wide 24/7 Dispatch Center under the authority of the College Police:
 - One number/one call college-wide for any emergency. Clear for all members of college community. Would also be used by college personnel at off-campus sites.
 - With established protocols and dedicated resources, the center would ensure that needed communications occur for various types of emergencies, including the initiation of various on- and off-campus messaging systems providing guidance to faculty, staff, and students. Close coordination would be needed with Public Information and Information Technology Services. Overall, this effort would relieve the six campuses from each having to develop a complex set of communication plans while allowing as needed the adaptation of some messages for the specific needs of given campuses.
 - Allows police officers and business managers to focus on incident response, not communication.
 - Should relieve police officers of some administrative reporting and other requirements so that their focus can be on campus presence and other priorities.
 - Would provide control and monitoring of various systems such as cameras, early alert warning, alarms, and radio communications.
 - As the Dispatch Center becomes established, it could be considered for assuming other functions related to safety and security that would not detract from its primary function.

College Police

- Although centralization of the College Police has resulted in higher levels of command and control appropriate for emergency situations, attention also needs to be given to ensuring that the day-to-day activities of police are responsive to the distinctive needs of campus communities. Provosts and Campus Councils should be regularly consulted.
- As staffing resources become available, College Police should be considered for additional positions. Improved outcomes resulting from additional staffing must be specified and assessed.
- Police should continue to function as an integral part of campus and college-wide CARE teams.
- Various equipment upgrades should be supported:
 - Radios capable of campus-to-campus communication
 - Cisco IPICS
 - Personal protective equipment
 - Computed aided dispatch laptops
 - Mobile command emergency vehicles
- The Commission does not support enhanced tactical response weapons for the College Police. Such level of weaponry is questionable for the College Police function. As demonstrated in the Woodbridge incident, the college can rely on police response from the localities to provide this level of support and expertise.
- Police should continue to receive regular training in accord with developing standards for professional practice and changes in law.

Emergency Planning and Management

- The Woodbridge After Incident report demonstrated that the Office of Emergency Planning is as involved in emergency management as in planning and consequently recommended that the office and position be renamed “Emergency Management.” The Commission views the planning function as continuing to be significant, particularly in view of this report’s emphasis on

preventative measures; it therefore recommends that the unit and position be renamed “Emergency Planning and Management.”

- The unit should be organizationally situated so that it is at the center of or closely associated with all efforts related to emergency preparedness and response. Emergency Planning and Management should have direct access to all campus and college offices.
- The unit should provide the lead for development of new campus and college-wide Emergency Operation Plans (EOPs), ensuring that all organizational issues are consistently addressed and effectively resolved.
- The relation to College Police and Business Managers (as campus emergency coordinators) should be clearly specified and strengthened.
- As staffing resources become available, Emergency Planning and Management should be considered for additional positions. Improved outcomes resulting from additional staffing must be specified and assessed.
- Given the closely related nature of their functions, consideration should be given to combining Emergency Planning and Management, College Police, and Safety into one unit for College Safety and Security. This should be accomplished by the realignment of existing positions and resources.

Emergency Communications

- Information Technology Services (ITS) has responsibility for implementing and supporting a variety of communications technologies that provide emergency alerts and follow-up messages to the college community. These include
 - Text messages sent to cell phones (NOVA Alert)
 - Campus telephone alerts, to include phones placed in all classrooms
 - Computer desktop alerts
 - Campus digital signage screens
 - NVCC website
 - NovaConnect Phone
 - Personal Email (Sent Through Text Messaging System)
 - College Email (Faculty/Staff Only)

- College Email (Students Only)
 - NVCC TV
 - Campus Highway Radio
 - Department Telephone Notification
- These technologies constitute a strongly layered and redundant approach to communication that should provide access to needed information for the great majority in a time of crisis. Due to the different student populations and the wide range of technologies constantly undergoing innovation, the various mechanisms and media should be continuously reevaluated and assessed for their effectiveness in achieving the desired degree of communication. This ongoing assessment and adjustment should be a collaborative effort by all involved units, with particular attention paid to feedback from students, faculty, and staff.
 - Based on issues with timely and sufficient communication that occurred with the Woodbridge incident, much attention should be given to planning and exercises for testing these systems. Message content for various emergency scenarios should be developed by the Public Information division (crisis communications specialist) of College Marketing and Communications.
 - In addition to the above communications technologies managed by Information Technology Services, Facilities is also proceeding with installation of an Early Alert Warning System (EAWS) that will provide audible warnings in public address format that can be heard anywhere in campus buildings, including classrooms, hallways and stairwells. It is critical that there be technical coordination of the EAWS with the systems managed by ITS and content coordination with the emergency messaging being prepared by Public Information. All alert and communications systems must work in synch with one other and provide consistent messaging.
 - The installation of EAWS is proceeding for the MEC and Woodbridge. Plans for installation at other campuses are hampered because the system's cost makes it a capital project. The college should press for approval of the system as a capital project priority. The system should also be expanded, in accord with its scalable capability, to be heard on campuses outside the buildings.

Call Boxes

- The college has a large number of Call Boxes on all campuses maintained by Facilities. Regular assessment should be done as to the operability and adequacy of the Call Boxes, with upgrades and repairs completed in a timely manner.

Panic Buttons

- Particularly for those who work in offices, the capacity to alert police to a threatening situation through a “panic button” mechanism is highly desirable. A speed dial capability for phones is being actively explored. The adequacy of this approach needs to be assessed from both a technical and stakeholder perspective. If found to be wanting, the college should pursue further capability in this area.

Security Camera System

- The college currently has an extensive security camera system that was originally purchased through an agreement with Virginia State Police. The system has significant capabilities for recording incidents that are criminal, threatening, or otherwise concerning. These recordings can then be used to document such incidents for court, CARE team, or campus judicial purposes. It is therefore important that recordings be archived according to a standard protocol so that needed segments can be retrieved for a designated period of time.
- Unfortunately, the current software used to run the system is not reliable. A startling statistic from the Woodbridge incident is that only 9 of the 45 cameras were operable at the time of the incident.
- Efforts are underway to replace the software for greater reliability. Equally critical is having a clear procedure in place that assigns responsibility for

monitoring and maintaining the system on each campus to a designated position or office.

Clarifying Organizational Responsibilities and Ensuring Coordination

Role of Business Managers

- The Business Managers for the six campuses serve as the designated Emergency Response Coordinators in liaison with the College Director of Emergency Planning.
 - Prepare, maintain, and communicate all relevant campus emergency preparedness/response/recovery plans
 - Coordinate all training for campus personnel assigned to emergency preparedness
 - Maintain awareness of current issues and “state of the art” developments in emergency preparedness
 - Ensure that emergency drills are planned and conducted as per established schedules
- Business Managers also have responsibility for centers and leased space associated with their campuses:
 - Alexandria Campus – Arlington Center
 - Annandale campus – Brault Building, Warehouse/Purchasing/Facilities, 7630 LRT, ELI
 - Loudoun Campus – Reston Center, Signal Hill
 - Manassas – Innovation Park
- Given that the primary duties of the Business Managers are financial in nature, there is limited time for them to focus on the highly important responsibilities for safety and security. Furthermore, it is not clear that Business Managers have sufficient training and resources to carry out these functions. As staffing resources become available, consideration should be given for additional

positions to support these functions. Improved outcomes resulting from additional staffing must be specified and assessed.

- The Commission finds that there is lack of consistency across the campus business offices as to how these responsibilities related to safety and security are carried out.
- The operational relationship between the Business Managers and the Director of Emergency Planning and Management needs to be significantly stronger.
- The relationship between the Business Managers and the Provosts needs to be explicit with established procedures that are understood and observed by all involved (see below).

Role of Provosts

- Although the Provost is designated to serve as the chief administrative officer of the campus and is regarded as the “face” of the campus for students, faculty, staff, and community, key functions related to safety and security (Business Managers, Police, and Facilities personnel) report to the Vice President of Finance and Administration. Not infrequently, the Provost is inadvertently bypassed in key decisions and projects. The role of the Provost in emergency situations remains ill defined. Although informal relationships may be good among the parties, the need for formalized structure and protocols is critical for a large and complex institution like NOVA.
- It is critical that Provosts and Vice Presidents collaborate as to shared expectations and establish a clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities in relation to safety and security. The President needs to facilitate this process.

Committees

- The membership and purpose of the Emergency Planning Committee should be reviewed and revised in accord with the overall findings of this report. The committee should ensure the relevance and ongoing update of college-wide

policies and procedures regarding safety and security at NOVA, with particular attention to their implementation on the campuses. It is important that the deliberations and decisions of this group are routinely communicated to Administrative Council, with major policy issues and projects brought there for final approval.

- The role of the Campus Health, Safety and ADA Compliance Committees should be reviewed and revised so that they are more engaged in the college's overall safety and security structure (e.g., the recent Comprehensive Security Assessment done by CTI Consulting).
- Consideration should be given to establishing an Advisory Committee for Safety and Security, reporting to the President, which would function as the means for continuing the work of the Commission by maintaining formalized and ongoing stakeholder oversight of issues as well as a means for observations and recommendations to reach Administrative Council. While the Emergency Planning Committee should be an operational group, this committee would be distinctly "advisory" in nature. It should function in a way analogous to the already existing Budget Advisory Committee and be headed by a Provost.
- A periodic Safety and Security Symposium, sponsored jointly by both committees, would be a valuable way for keeping important issues in front of the college community and ensuring that substantial progress is being made. Consideration should also be given to using current college-wide and campus-specific forums and events as occasions to promote understanding of developments related to safety and security.

Communication, Consultation, Coordination, and Collaboration

- The Commission observes that all college units concerned with safety and security must deliberately pursue strategies for keeping other appropriate units informed and involved in projects and activities for which they serve as lead. Several important instances were noted where such communication and coordination had not occurred. The Vice President for Finance and Administration and the Director of Emergency Planning and Management

should have the particular charge of ensuring that such communication and coordination occurs for all major projects and procurements.

NOTE: See [appendices](#) and [other information](#).