

# Theta Tau

## Crisis Management Plan

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To: *Theta Tau National Officers*

You play a critical role in our ability to successfully manage communications during a crisis. We must all be prepared to address a crisis and work together to ensure that all of our communications are timely and accurate – regardless of what comes our way. This Crisis Management Plan outlines how you as a National Volunteer should work with the Theta Tau Crisis Management Team to ensure that a crisis that may occur at any level of our organization is managed efficiently and effectively. Perceptions quickly become realities in a crisis. How well we manage a crisis is not just determined by the actions we take, but how quickly, effectively and accurately we communicate to address the concerns of our key audiences. Whether the crisis involves an incident at a chapter, an injury, or a lawsuit, the media and our response will play critical roles in defining the public's response.

You are responsible for:

- Reading this plan and knowing your role in crisis management.
- Immediately contacting the Crisis Management Team in the event of a crisis.
- Being prepared to provide communications support only when required.
- Relaying all crisis communications with the individuals outlined in this document.
- Reviewing this plan annually with the National Officers to ensure it is up to date.

How well we manage a crisis is not just determined by the actions we take, but how quickly, effectively and accurately we communicate to address the concerns of our key audiences.

Remember:

### **Be Proactive**

Because of the chaotic nature of a crisis and the desire to avoid mistakes, we may prefer to avoid all communication. If we choose not to communicate, outsiders will do it on our behalf. They may interpret available facts unfavorably.

### **Be Timely**

Provide appropriate information in a timely manner.

### **Be Credible**

Do not speculate. Do not make unsubstantiated claims. Do not promise anything you aren't sure you can deliver. Do not assume that others making public statements have any more knowledge than you or that they possess the wisdom to not speak about which they do not know.

# Identifying the Crisis

Identifying an incident when it is happening and properly categorizing it is crucial to handling the communication of the event properly. Different types, circumstances, and impacts of events will require different action to be taken.

Theta Tau's Crisis Management Team consists of the Grand Regent, Risk Management Committee chairperson, and the Executive Director. The first step to be taken, is to determine who from that team will take the lead for the particular incident.

The next steps will vary depending on the severity of the incident.

## *What incidents may require action according to this plan?*

- External stakeholder demands
- Expectations of internal stakeholders
- Severe risk management incident
- Risk management incident with emergency medical / police involvement such as injury or fatality
- University action against a chapter / member
- Incident gaining media attention
- Lawsuit
- Mental health issues (suicide)\*

\*The most common cause of physical harm to Theta Tau student members is not related to alcohol, drugs, or hazing. It is suicide.

## *What level of response is needed?*

The level of response required will depend on the situation. Levels of response can vary and can be found in the list below:

- Risk Management Committee action
- Crisis Management Team Involvement
- Legal Counsel required
- Public Relations firm contracted

# Establishing a Communication Plan

## *Who can make statements?*

The Grand Regent, Executive Director, Legal Counsel, or contracted PR firm are the only individuals who should be making public statements on behalf of the fraternity. Other National Officers should refrain from commenting, “liking”, or replying to any comment or request, other than referring individuals to an official statement. This will ensure the most correct, up to date information is being presented publicly by the fraternity. Any statement made by a National Officer, even in private, could be construed by others as an official statement from the fraternity.

## *What types of communication are there?*

External Communication - informing those outside the organization (public, university, etc)

- [Theta Tau Website](#)
- [Theta Tau Wikipedia Page](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Reddit](#)

Internal Communication - information sent to National Officers and/or Chapters

- Initial communication to Executive Council and Executive Director to ensure alignment and to provide clear communication of facts
- Communication to affected National Officers of event, and what actions, if any, should be taken
- Communication to chapters as to how they can respond to the incident, as needed

## *What actions should be taken?*

- Identify where and how often all official communications should be posted
- Identify any social media sites that may need to be locked down
- Decide if any public posts should have comments disabled if possible
- Identify individuals to monitor feedback

## *When can communications be released and who vets them?*

Pending the severity of the event, any communication must be approved by the designee of the Crisis Management Team. An initial external communication posting should be made within 12 hours of the initiating event. The Executive Council will be made aware prior to all communications being made public. All public communications should provide a time/date and location for the next update, even if that update ultimately provides no further information.

# Developing a Communication Strategy

## *Who is involved?*

The Legal Counsel and PR Firm (if needed) will be involved in creating all communications to be posted publicly.

## *What is our stance?*

The Crisis Management Team will develop the public position of the fraternity, utilizing any external resources they feel are required (Legal Counsel, PR Firms, National Officers, University Officials, etc.). This stance will vary depending on the facts of the incident and severity of each issue. Our communication strategy should be fluid and as feedback is monitored it should be amended as appropriate.

## *Who decides the action plan?*

The Crisis Management Team will develop an action plan to be followed by the fraternity, utilizing any external resources as required (Legal Counsel, PR Firms, National Officers, University Officials, etc.). This action plan will vary depending on the facts of the incident and severity of each issue.

## *Keeping outside communications on message from other units of the fraternity*

- A message template will be provided by the Crisis Management Team to the National Officers and chapters on how they can respond. This may vary depending on the situation and should be sent in a timely manner.
- If a severe incident occurs, all communication/updates within the organization shall be verbal (e.g. face to face or over the phone) to ensure details are accurate and not misrepresented.
- Any communications (e-mail, phone calls, social media, media requests, etc) sent to individual members should be forwarded to the Crisis Management Lead so a proper response can be formed as needed.

## *What if I disagree with the communication plan decided or implemented?*

The Crisis Management Team, Legal Counsel, and PR Firm may have information that they are unable to share at any particular moment. While it is certainly fine to ask questions or probe soundness, it is not acceptable to publicly undermine the official messaging. If a fundamental disagreement exists between you and the course decided for any reason, you should consider carefully if resignation of office would be appropriate at that moment, or within a respectful and short time thereafter. The Crisis Management Team will develop an action plan to be followed by the fraternity, utilizing any external resources they feel are required (Legal Counsel, PR Firms, National Officers, University Officials, etc.).

# Monitoring Reactions

At least one National Officer should be monitoring social media and news sources after the incident. The goal is to stay on top of new, trending issues so that the organization can respond clearly and promptly. This person will be designated by the Crisis Management Team in the beginning of the process, as appropriate. Feedback should be provided to the Crisis Management Team as the new situations develop or at a minimum once per 12 hours.

As feedback is gained, the Crisis Management Team will re-evaluate the communication strategy and plan and adjust it as needed following the processes outlined in previous sections of this document.

# Providing Updates

The Crisis Management Team should communicate with each other at least daily (more if the incident is severe or public reaction demands it) to align on information, identify new issues, and distribute actions to other individuals/groups as needed.

## *When are updates provided?*

Updates, both internal and external, should be provided in a timely manner, remembering that ensuring accurate information and clear communication is the highest priority. Even a message of “We are aware of [short incident description] and are investigating. The next update will be provided when we know more” provides acknowledgement and shows we take an issue seriously and are providing open communication.

Note that external stakeholders (and some internal) will want and seek regular (often hourly) updates, comments, or response. All seasoned PR professionals would advise that it is prudent to avoid extraneous, redundant, and seemingly innocuous statements when nothing has really changed.

## *To whom should updates be provided?*

Consider all the affected parties:

- Chapters/student members
- Alumni
- University administrators
- Friends/family of individual(s) associated with the event
- General public

# Managing Media Requests

Depending on the severity of the incident, local or national media may be involved. It is important to maintain proper communication channels and keep our message clear and accurate when dealing with the media. Only the Grand Regent, Executive Director, or their designees may make public statements or address the media. Theta Tau's Media Protocol, found in the Policy and Procedure manual should also be consulted prior to making any statements to the public. Some guidelines for dealing with the media are found below:

## **Be Prepared for the Media**

### *Speak clearly:*

- Keep sentences short.
- Use simple language – no organizational abbreviations or jargon.

### *Don't speculate:*

- Your answer should be, "I don't have information on that at this time."

### *Don't say "No comment:"*

- Your answer should be, "I don't have any information on that. I'll try to get back to you when possible."

### *Tell the truth:*

- Be sure that your information is up-to-date and accurate.

## **Interviews**

### *Preparation:*

- Understand the issue.
- Develop a set of messages that provide the information you want/need to convey.
- Know what information you can give and what information you cannot give.
- Develop and practice key messages and responses to anticipated questions.

### *During an interview:*

- Begin the interview by making your major points in statement form.
- Avoid acronyms; the audience is wider than those who understand Greek-letter life.
- Never speak "off the record." – If you think what you are saying should be "off the record," then you should not be speaking about the matter.
- Never assume the microphone or tape recorder is off.
- Be honest at all times, though this does not mean divulging all information that you may have at a particular time.
- Stay "on message."
- Be confident, but not arrogant.
- Avoid hypothetical/what-if/laundry list questions.
- Correct any information errors upon discovery. Do not delay!
- If you don't know the answer or cannot answer, admit it and move on.
- Never speculate on what has happened or could happen.



- Don't speak for anyone else.
- Don't be afraid of "uncomfortable" silence or long pauses between questions. Don't feel the need to fill them in by talking.
- Look at the interviewer rather than the camera or monitor.
- Restate your key messages at the end of the interview.
- Always remain composed.
- Avoid assigned or accepted blame.

# Appendix A

## Sample Communications:

### Incident

Theta Tau Issues Statement Regarding [INCIDENT]

The following statement was issued today by Theta Tau [*Spokesperson Name*]

At approximately [*time*] Theta Tau confirms that it received a report of [*nature of event*]. We are working to determine if there any [*damage, injuries, etc.*]. According to information confirmed at this time, the [*event*] occurred at [*time and day*]. Reports indicate that [*confirmed information from event*] and that [*concise description of specific response/measures*] are being taken to protect [*students, public, property, etc.*].

The safety and well-being of our students [*others affected*] is our first priority. [*expression of compassion/concern if appropriate*]. Appropriate procedures are being followed and Theta Tau is coordinating with officials at the scene. We will be providing further information through [*website address*]. The next briefing will take place at [*location/time*].

Note for Media: Media briefings will be held at [*location*] at [*time*].

### Fatality

Theta Tau Issues Statement Regarding [INCIDENT]

The following statement was issued today by Theta Tau [*Spokesperson Name*]

At approximately [*time*] Theta Tau confirms that it received a report of [*nature of event*].

We are working to determine [*damage, injuries, etc.*]. According to information confirmed at this

time, the [*event*] occurred at [*time and location*]. Reports indicate that [*confirmed information from event*] and that [*concise description of specific response/measures*] are being taken to protect [*students, public, property, etc.*].

The safety and well-being of our students [*others affected*] is our first priority [*expression of compassion/concern if appropriate*]. Appropriate procedures are being followed and Theta Tau is coordinating with officials at the scene. We will be providing further information through [*website address*]. The next briefing will take place at [*location/time*].

Note for Media: Media briefings will be held at [*location*] at [*time*].

## Suicide

Theta Tau Issues Statement Regarding [INCIDENT]

The following statement was issued today by Theta Tau [*Spokesperson Name*]

Theta Tau was informed today that a member at [*Chapter, School*] has died. The apparent cause of death was suicide. Our thoughts and support go out to [*his/her*] family, friends, and all our brothers at this difficult time.

We have contacted the [*School*] counseling resource center [*provide details of who/where it is located*] and they will be available to meet with all those affected as needed.

Theta Tau encourages anyone considering suicide to reach out and talk with someone at the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or visit its website at <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>.

## Lawsuit

Theta Tau Issues Statement Regarding [LAWSUIT]

The following statement was issued today by Theta Tau [*Spokesperson or Name*]

Theta Tau has been served a [*type of lawsuit*] filed by [*organization name or person*]. We are currently reviewing the information and cannot provide further details at this time.

*or*

Theta Tau and its counsel have reviewed the allegations in the complaint and assert they are wholly without merit and the fraternity intends to defend itself vigorously.

# Media Contact Log

This log keeps track of media inquiries. Add these contacts to your media list.

*Date and time of Inquiry*

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*Reporter Name*

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*Media Outlet*

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*Media Deadline*

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*Phone Numbers*

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*Email Address*

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*Question(s)*

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*Your Response*

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*Date & Time of Response to Media*

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# Appendix B

## Crisis Management Team Contacts

*Grand Regent:* Jamey Vann - 716-445-3266 (jamey.vann@thetatau.org)

*Executive Director:* Michael Abraham - 512-587-5140 (mike.abraham@thetatau.org)

*Risk Management Chair:* Dan McConnell - 352-816-0858 (dan.mcconnell@thetatau.org)

*Legal Counsel:* David Sergi - 512-757-1570 (david@sergilaw.com)

*PR Firm:* Studio K Media (Brandon Weghorst) - 847-513-3577 (brandon@studiokmedia.com)