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The necessity of extensive planning for major campus events has become essential to ensure a safe environment for all participants. This chapter explores the way one campus is challenging negative major event behaviors from pre-event preparations to post-event celebrations.

Confronting Undesirable Traditions: A Case Study

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It is almost 11 P.M. on March 31, 2001. The University of Maryland campus and the city of College Park are quiet. Students are gathered around TV sets in their apartments, residence hall rooms, and at the local bars and restaurants. Occasionally one can hear cheers of approval or cries of complaint. The University of Maryland Terrapins are playing the Duke University Blue Devils in Maryland's first-ever Final Four performance in the NCAA basketball tournament.

Suddenly, chaos erupts. Maryland has lost to its arch-rival and Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) opponent for the second time this season. Students come streaming out of all buildings—onto the campus, down to Fraternity Row, and into the streets of College Park. They bring books and papers, and carry mattresses and couches. Bonfires begin amid the screaming hordes yelling, “Duke sucks!” Riotous behavior ensues and the campus and county police do their best to manage the mayhem. Thousands of students gather on Fraternity Row and in the streets of College Park, resulting in more than sixty bonfires—and more than \$250,000 in damages (Roig-Franzia, 2001).

By 2 A.M. the fires are extinguished and the students are moving slowly back to their rooms. What follows can only be described as a media massacre—finger-pointing from agency to agency, campus to city, and person to person. Who was responsible for this horrendous scene? And who would be responsible for making sure it never happened again? Unfortunately, the University of Maryland is one of many campuses that have experienced such disturbances. A Lexis-Nexis search of major newspapers found at least twenty-six such documented disturbances involving

college campuses over the past five years. Student affairs staff are typically expected to be involved in the management of these challenges and crises (Sandeen, 1991).

Background

All across the country, at universities with major athletic programs, revenue sports competitions have become major events. These games and tournaments have all the necessary characteristics of a major event, including pre-event planning, participation by large numbers of people, involvement of multiple campus agencies, complex traffic situations, risks to personal safety, potential campus vandalism, and the challenge of public relations. Campuses are struggling with how to plan for these events, how to manage these events, and how to deal with and minimize the consequences that occur once the event is over.

At the University of Maryland, with the emergence of a basketball team that recently participated in the NCAA Final Four competition and a football program that won the ACC title, we have faced the challenges of managing major events related to these athletic activities. Although we have not completely achieved our desired outcomes, some useful lessons have been learned related to major event management and safety throughout the life cycle of an event.

Pre-Event Planning

Prior to any major campus event, planning and coordination of multiple campus agencies is essential (Triponey, 2001; Wasiolek, 2001). This type of organization should occur months in advance and continue up until hours before an event begins. Many logistical considerations are necessary, and they vary from event to event. They may include expectations for ticket holder and fan behavior, access to and departure from the event, parking issues, and staff management roles.

Agency Coordination. At Maryland a coordination meeting two weeks before each major athletic event involves representatives from the offices of the vice presidents of student affairs (representing thirteen student life units), administrative affairs (representing public safety, grounds, and facilities management), and selected departments including police, parking, dining services, campus programs, intercollegiate athletics, and alumni programs. Several institutions use this type of coordination mechanism for major events and campus crises (Siegel, 1994). The purpose of this meeting is to ensure logistical plans are in place, that staff in all relevant departments are fully informed, and that department representatives have the opportunity for input on the overall management of activities during the event. This kind of pre-event planning sets a tone of working collaboratively and cooperatively on the game, and ensures, to every extent possible, a safe event (Wasiolek, 2001).

In addition to campus coordination, a cooperative relationship between the campus and the surrounding community is not only helpful but essential for major events. The pre-event collaboration of institutional and community officials, as well as campus and county police agencies, can help facilitate a unified response to major events (Sandeem, 1991). Typically, the institution's vice president for student affairs or vice president for administrative affairs will initiate this kind of coordinating activity.

Information Dissemination and Ticket Distribution. One facet of planning for these events is establishing clear expectations for attendees. Whether for sale or free of charge, ticket distribution needs to be orderly and fair. Whenever possible, the Web and campus e-mail are used to provide information and to distribute tickets. Nonetheless, at Maryland, distribution of student tickets for athletic events usually takes place through the Athletic Department ticket office, and inevitably students wait in lines. If a line is anticipated, posted hours of distribution and the use of a waiting area that protects students from inclement weather and accommodates them in a relatively comfortable setting are helpful. Provision of a reasonable waiting area reduces the safety hazards incurred when people are impatient, tempers are short, and students are concerned about not getting tickets. An alternate strategy is to take a waiting list of names so that students are able to move around, study, or sleep instead of standing in line.

Access to Events. Once tickets are distributed, event attendees should be given clear directions and expectations about basic logistical needs such as traffic patterns, parking, timing of events, and the hours of operation that facilities will be open and functional. This can be accomplished by distributing information prior to events, either with tickets or via e-mail notification.

Expectations for Participants. It is especially important for people to understand, in advance, expectations regarding fan behavior. Institutions that have experienced incidents of hostility and unsportsmanlike conduct should establish expectations for spectator participation. This can be accomplished through a series of strategies: news articles and guest editorials in the student newspapers, alumni publications, as well as flyers distributed on-site. At Maryland, we have faced difficult fan behavior, including students and non-students verbally abusing opposing teams and their fans, throwing newspapers, ice, and cans onto the floor or field, and being drunk and disorderly. There is clearly an association between the use of alcohol and disorderly behavior (Frahm, 1998). Being clear in advance that this behavior is unacceptable and will have consequences has been an important element of behavioral change. In fact, these events may provide opportunities for students to develop what Boyer (1995) refers to as a sense of personal and civic responsibility.

Logistics During Events

Once an event begins, an orchestration of great proportions takes place through a central command center. Each agency has a place, each player has a role, and each person's actions are scripted down to the last detail. All of

the staff are connected via cell phone or radio and available if assistance is needed.

Staffing. Adequate staffing is absolutely vital for these kinds of events. The most effective staffing plan for a major event is a cross-departmental team approach (Wasiolek, 2001). Ideally there is a mix of experienced professional staff on hand, supplemented by contracted special events staff and volunteers. However, people with varying levels of experience and expertise often work at these events, which can present challenges. Training, supervision, and clear communication are essential and the definition of roles is very important.

For Maryland events, the Athletic Department assumes responsibility for the facility. Contracted special events staff assume the role of frontline security at the entrances and as ushers during the events. Student affairs staff are present as positive role models. University police are there as a visible presence to deter inappropriate behavior, to deal with disorderly people, and if necessary to remove fans from the audience.

Staff Roles. Everyone staffing such events should know how to distinguish volunteer roles from those of contract employees and university staff and police. An important notion for our institution is the preeminence of the police role when issues of public safety are at stake. Police are solely responsible for monitoring the inappropriate or illegal activity of the crowd and taking any necessary actions to ensure maintenance of a safe environment. The student affairs staff who work these events are usually the only volunteer presence during the event and at any post-game celebrations. Although they are not trained in safety issues, these staff members are known by the student body and can provide face validity that may deter inappropriate behavior. Student affairs staff are connected by radio or cell phone to the police at all times.

Safety Issues During Events. Although pre-event planning can reduce the risks at events, additional steps can and should be taken on site. These include maintaining a command center, ensuring that fans do not bring in objects or substances that could be of concern, creating a positive ambiance during the event, maintaining an appropriate level of staff and police visibility during the event, and maintaining health services on site.

Command Center. Setting up a command center has been an effective mechanism for coordinating staff during major events. Everyone involved is aware of the physical location of the center, which typically works best when it is near the outskirts of the event so that it is easily accessible to everyone involved (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1998). Police, staff, and volunteers maintain regular contact with their counterparts in the command center via short-wave radio or cell phone. This system allows continuous communication for everyone connected with the event.

Scanning at the Event. At these kinds of events, people often try to bring in substances or objects that pose threats to safety. Of particular concern are alcohol and objects that may be thrown during the event. Event ushers,

with backup by police, assume responsibility for scanning people as they enter the facility. The ushers may choose to “pat down” people or check the content of a bag if they have reason to believe the person may be carrying something that presents a threat to safety. The usher has the authority to confiscate illegal substances or objects and to refuse entry to people. Warning signs for this kind of check and possible consequences are prominently posted.

Game Management. Experience with athletic events indicates that the tenor of the situation contributes to behavior during and after the games. For this reason, it is useful to pay attention to elements that can contribute to the tone of the event. In recent years, the ambiance during games at many Division I institutions has shifted from a tone of support for one’s home team to one of denigrating the visiting team. This includes T-shirts with inappropriate slogans, signs, and rude cheers during events.

Combating Inappropriate Behavior. As a public institution that values free speech, we accept the notion that fans are free to announce and display sentiments the university would not support. However, to support a more positive environment, the university has taken several steps. A blue-ribbon panel on sportsmanship was created, made up of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and members of the booster club. This group created a statement about sportsmanship that has been widely publicized, and established community standards for behavior (President’s Committee on Sportsmanship, 2001). In addition, student leaders have written letters to the student newspaper discouraging negative displays. Through funding, the university has supported student government’s efforts to promote the wearing of a particular T-shirt with a positive school spirit message. The vice president for student affairs, the director of the student union and campus programs, and the chief of police have held open forums with student leaders and the general student body to discuss ways to support the team in positive ways. The university band has been limited in the number of times they can play a song that has words that could be offensive. (Banning the song only resulted in its being sung a cappella by the audience many more times than when the band plays the song once per game period.)

Although these measures have reduced some of the tensions in the stadium and arena, they have not eliminated them. To date, a more positive ambiance has been achieved and no significant hostile encounters have occurred between fans.

Creating a Buffer Zone. In examining hostile incidents between home fans and visiting teams at men’s basketball games, we ascertained that most take place with the most ardent fans sitting adjacent to opposing team supporters and close to the visiting team players. Particularly when scores are close and tensions are high, verbal hostilities are more likely to occur, and these sometimes lead to an escalation of physical encounters between fans. To discourage this, we created a buffer zone that consists of five rows of seats between the visiting bench and the general student section. A lottery

for student groups was created. Organizations could place their name in the lottery if they agreed to occupy these seats and be role models for good sportsmanship. Because these are highly prized seats, students were eager to participate, and because they were representing their organizations, they were eager to represent them positively. This has been a very effective method to date for eliminating hostile encounters between fans and encouraging good sportsmanship.

Police Response. With expectations clearly stated and consequences widely known, university police have acted decisively when any disorderly behavior occurs in a stadium or arena. This involves immediately removing the person from the premises and may entail a referral to the Judicial Affairs Office. This might be in response to a person who appears to be inebriated and behaving in a disorderly manner, or may involve a person who throws an object at other fans or onto the court or field.

Mandatory Health Services. Having health services on-site at major athletic events has been an essential. This includes a clearly identifiable room where highly trained staff are available, including a physician, registered nurses, a physician's assistant, and two emergency medical technicians. While this may seem like a large staff, we believe it just adequate for a basketball event involving seventeen thousand; in fact, we add staff for football events, which can have over fifty thousand people in attendance. Two ambulances are also ready on-site in case an injured person needs transport to a hospital.

The demand for health services varies. There are typically more injuries during evening events, and when fans attend pre-game events involving the use of alcohol. The types of injuries range from simple sprains to heart attacks. Having a full range of medical staff on-site enables the university to have an efficient and effective response.

Post-Game Activities

Whatever the outcome, once a game or event is complete, students and other fans want to cheer in excitement or groan in disappointment. The post-game energy at an event is palpable, and few fans want to remain quietly in their seats and leave the event in an orderly way.

Within the Stadium or Coliseum. After particular athletic events, fans have begun to feel it imperative to stream onto playing fields and courts. The safety risks associated with this are readily apparent. Players and coaches can be surrounded and hurt. Students and staff can be trampled. Goal posts can be toppled, resulting in injury to people on the field. In addition to personal injury, property damage is very likely in this situation (Goold, 2000; Vest, 2000). The University of Maryland has experienced all of these outcomes.

In an effort to ensure safety in these situations, the university has tried different strategies including posting event ushers close to the entrances of

the court or stadium floor, having police play a visible role, and always educating fans about the safety issues related to this kind of activity. Unfortunately, none of these actions have deterred fans from post-game activities. The current stance is that we will continue campaigning to discourage this behavior. We will put in place a gentle usher and police resistance, but will not be heavy-handed in our opposition as prior experience tells us that this can result in more injuries.

Some approaches that have been moderately successful include visual displays such as fireworks (when the event is in a stadium) that keep people in their seats, and spirited addresses by the coaches or players. Safety issues regarding this situation continue to be a challenge.

Post-Game Gatherings. Students and other fans have a need to come together after these events to seek community, celebrate, and release tension. Experience at this university and others, including Michigan State University, Duke, and the University of Arizona, would indicate that this phenomenon is widespread and unfortunately occurring with greater frequency (Strauss, 2001).

Many safety risks are involved with these kinds of activities. Whenever thousands of people in high spirits gather together in one location, there are definite concerns about crowd management, behavior resulting from excessive use of alcohol, and the building of spontaneous bonfires as a form of celebration. As early as 1982, Lewis identified the phenomenon of *fan violence* as a rampage that occurs when a large crowd of sports spectators, typically exhibiting drunken behavior, engage in destructive behavior.

These kinds of gatherings typically take place in a large open space. For our campus, this is a grassy area surrounded by fraternity houses. This space is considered part of the university campus but is viewed by many as on the edge of campus, and is a traditional outside gathering space where other university-sponsored activities are held.

Since the spontaneous celebration in early 2001 described at the beginning of this chapter, other celebrations have occurred and we have had to consider Fraternity Row green space as a high-risk area for safety after major athletic events. The strategy for managing this area has been the presence of student affairs staff in the area. This includes frontline staff who are likely to know large numbers of students personally and staff who have an established rapport with student leaders on campus. The presence of staff during these incidents ensures that students feel a calming presence, and also makes it less likely that students can be anonymous members of a crowd. Student affairs staff are not expected to stop or inhibit bad behavior, but we can hope their simple presence among the students will tend to decrease misbehavior.

Working in concert with the student affairs staff, adequate police support is on hand in case the crowd becomes disorderly. This usually involves supplementing the university police force with county and state police, all working under the command of the university police chief. A fire truck is

scheduled on-site, and police are prepared to enter a crowd in protective gear if warranted. The coordination of the police presence with the campus administrative staff is one of the most crucial aspects of maintaining a safe environment (Triponey, 2001; Wasiolek, 2001).

Among the greatest challenges campuses face in these post-game celebrations are spontaneous fires, that is, fires for which students and fans did not obtain a permit prior to the event. A permit entails agreeing to abide by safety regulations that limit the size of the fire (five feet by five feet on our campus) and the students' proximity to the fire (fifty feet away from the blaze); it also requires a fire truck on-site. Having a fire without these safety precautions is a high-risk situation, and one that has been determined an unacceptable risk. When students are caught lighting these fires, they are promptly arrested and charged appropriately. Consequences include both campus and legal repercussions.

Results of Inappropriate Behavior. One additional strategy employed to manage post-game activities was to extend the Student Code of Conduct, with Campus Senate approval, to off-campus misdemeanor convictions. This allows the university, when it deems appropriate, to employ sanctions at its disposal to respond to student behavior in the surrounding community. This expansion of student conduct jurisdiction has occurred at other institutions as well (Triponey, 2001). The U.S. District Court supported the authority of institutions to establish behavioral standards (Pavela, 1999). This acknowledges the accountability of the university to the surrounding community, and offers some measure of safety to citizens in the community adjacent to the university (Argetsinger, 2001).

Postscript

The major events of the past year have been learning experiences for the staff at Maryland. After managing a variety of situations from athletic events, bonfires, and campus riots to a tornado that devastated the campus, some guidelines provided by Duncan (1993) and Baldrige and Julius (1998) have proven useful.

- Encourage and facilitate campuswide and campus-community coordination and pre-event planning.
- Keep the president and the public relations officer informed.
- Identify stakeholders and concerned parties.
- Involve the students in finding solutions.
- Facilitate collaboration between the police and the administration.
- Establish communication mechanisms for pre-event, during, and post-event issues.
- Define the roles and expectations of staff and volunteers.
- Don't delay planning and response; act rapidly.
- Develop a media relations plan.
- Have a productive, safe, and enjoyable event!

Fortunately, the scene presented at the beginning of this chapter has not recurred with the same magnitude, but we remain vigilant about these issues. The campaign for good sportsmanship continues; all athletic events are treated as major events that require preplanning and careful supervision; and we continue to be ready to intervene in post-game celebrations.

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