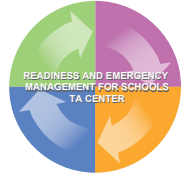




SUCCESS STORIES



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Code Blue: Seton Hall University Website for Emergency Preparedness and Response

Seton Hall University (SHU) is located in South Orange, N.J. As part of its 2009 Emergency Management for Higher Education (EMHE) grant objectives, SHU developed and implemented *Code Blue*, a website to introduce students and faculty members to emergency management issues. The theme of the site is “Be Aware, Be Prepared, and Take Action!” This *Success Stories* publication describes the contents of the site and the process undertaken by SHU to develop, implement, and promote the site. This *Success Stories* provides an example to other colleges and universities of how they might take on similar emergency preparedness marketing strategies on their own campuses.

To prepare this *Success Stories* publication, the REMS TA Center interviewed two Seton Hall University staff members who played key roles in developing and implementing the *Code Blue* website: Thomas Giordano, assistant director for emergency management in the Department of Public Safety and Security, and Michael Soupios, associate director for digital media at the Teaching, Learning and Technology Center.

Design and Development Content of *Code Blue*

Prior to developing *Code Blue*, SHU relied on the university’s orientation program to communicate emergency preparedness and response information. Michael Soupios worked with Student Affairs to present emergency-related information during new student orientation and “Welcome Week.” This collaborative effort

resulted in the creation of a series of “Choose Your Own Adventure” style videos that allowed students to make emergency response choices. The videos were shown to the entire freshman class. They were administered at three separate orientation sessions in a lecture hall holding as many as 400 students.

Giordano and Soupios knew that, as is the case at most colleges, students are inundated with information during orientation. While the large video presentation is effective and still used, they also believed that students needed the information reinforced and tailored to actionable items. They decided that a website would be an effective alternative forum, one that could reach a large number of students in a more engaging fashion. They met with students who confirmed their conclusion, and they asked these students to help formulate initial site content ideas. The students strongly advocated including games and making the site as interactive as possible.

Design and development of *Code Blue* began in the spring of 2010. The site was launched at the end of September 2010. The system is hosted internally on a server maintained by the university’s Department of Information Technology. The *Code Blue* site was created using the WordPress blogging platform, which hosts dozens of other sites and blogs all on the same server.

Selecting the name for the site required thought and creativity. Blue is one of SHU’s colors, and “blue” is also a term widely associated with

emergencies. The name *Code Blue* seemed clever and fitting.

Using student input, a graphic designer and web developer from the Teaching, Learning and Technology Center developed the primary layout for the website. It utilizes a “comic book” style to make the site visually engaging. Feedback on the design scheme has been very positive. The URL for the site is <http://blogs.shu.edu/codeblue>.

Following the advice of students involved in the design process, the website has many interactive features. There are four interactive training modules and two interactive computer games. “Freshman Studies” is one of the training modules utilized by freshmen attending the mandatory University Life class. One of the games is “Wheel of Misfortune” which asks the user questions about natural hazards, technological hazards, and intentional hazards.

One of the challenges faced when implementing the system, according to Davis, was communicating with schools about the

role and value in what the system could offer. The system was developed from scratch, Davis explained, and once they began approaching schools about putting cameras, floor plans, and school safety plans online, they faced initial apprehension from school personnel about privacy concerns. “We had to assure them that this is a secure site, and that no one can view it without expressly being given permission—that’s why we created the system so district superintendents would be the ones to control all the access, usernames, and passwords.” Once that was understood by the schools, they were on board with the system.

The team that designed and developed *Code Blue* is currently working to create a similar emergency preparedness training module for all campus employees, which will be added to the *Code Blue* website. They are also researching how best to reach upperclassmen, who are not a “captive” audience such as freshmen.

Code Blue features information on two of SHU’s principal emergency response communication



systems—the emergency siren and the “PirateAlert” notification system. To help attract students to the site, there are also links to useful nonemergency information: weather, news, traffic alerts, and a lost-and-found feature.

Code Blue also links to safety and emergency management information found on other university websites:

- The SHU FAST page (Fire Awareness Safety Team),
- The SHU campus CERT (Community Emergency Response Team),
- A web page that explains the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), and
- A web page that describes the Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT).

Feedback on site usage indicates that some students first learned of these resources by visiting *Code Blue*.

Deployment and Usage

Launched at the beginning of the 2010 academic year, *Code Blue* was first promoted using email and the university’s mandatory freshman and transfer student orientation programs. During a freshman orientation session, students are briefed by a Public Safety representative on basic emergency procedures and encouraged to view the *Code Blue* website. Students are then required to complete the “Freshman Studies” module on the *Code Blue* site during their University Life class. At first, teachers dedicated only about ten minutes for this activity, but because they received so much positive feedback from participants, they now allow more time so that students can explore the *Code Blue* site further.

Usage of *Code Blue* is tracked using Google Analytics, a system that provides statistics on site visits, page visits, the duration of user sessions, and referral source (i.e. how the user got to the *Code Blue* site). This data gives

system administrators valuable information such as which pages are most popular. While most users are local to SHU, there have been users from overseas, from as far away as Hong Kong and India.

SHU is creating personal safety videos with the goal of posting a new video each month. To date, three personal safety videos have been added. The first video addresses staying safe and aware while walking on or off campus. A second video covers residence hall safety. The third talks about the effect of alcohol and drugs on personal safety. The style of the videos matches the style of the website—motion comic book with live action photos and hand-drawn characters. The videos conclude with a bulleted list of key items for students to remember.

Code Blue was not designed to be used during an emergency situation. The university employs a notification system called PirateAlert that utilizes cell phone (voice and text) messages, email, and home or office telephones for use during actual emergencies. Instead, *Code Blue* complements emergency notification systems by teaching the concepts of emergency preparedness and response in advance of emergencies, taking an “all-hazards” approach.

Reflections and Observations

One challenge that SHU staff face in supporting the *Code Blue* site is distilling large amounts of important emergency management information into site content that is concise and easy to understand. This content development process takes a substantial amount of time as well as careful judgment. Using consistent terminology throughout the website is also a challenge. While the “comic book” design theme of the site is appealing to students, SHU staff do not want this to undermine the urgency of the messages being conveyed. While some answers to the multiple-choice questions are humorous, the actual statements that appear to the players

upon answering the game questions are straightforward and serious. The center blog section is also kept serious. Striking a balance between the fun design theme of the site and the seriousness of its content requires constant attention.

One goal of *Code Blue* is to instill within students a desire to lead when it comes to emergency preparedness and response. Familiarity with the information on the site will help students take care of themselves and others around them, contributing to an effective response to an emergency situation.

Giordano and Soupios have the following advice for other higher education institutions that might want to replicate a site such as *Code Blue*:

- Work with people who understand the audience you are trying to reach. Include student input into the design and content.

- Take advantage of having a captive audience, such as a requirement that emergency preparedness and response be a mandatory class for freshmen and transfers.
- Make the site as interesting and fun to use as possible. Use games to attract interest and include other features such as a lost-and-found or weather and traffic information to draw persons to the site.
- Offer similar emergency-related materials to faculty and staff.

Developing and deploying *Code Blue* has been rewarding for staff at SHU, especially receiving positive feedback from students. “Our goal is to create awareness and help people know what to do and when to do it,” said Gordiano. “Actually seeing them do the right things during an emergency at some point will be fantastic.”

The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center was established in October 2007 by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Healthy Students (OSHS), *formerly the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS)*. The center supports schools and school districts in developing and implementing comprehensive emergency management plans by providing technical assistance via trainings, publications, and individualized responses to requests. For additional information about school emergency management topics, visit the REMS TA Center at <http://rems.ed.gov> or call 1-866-540-REMS (7367). For information about the EMHE grant program, contact Tara Hill (tara.hill@ed.gov).

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