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# An Analysis of Image Repair Strategies: A University in Crisis

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AN ANALYSIS OF IMAGE REPAIR STRATEGIES: A UNIVERSITY IN CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

This study identifies and describes the elements of Image Repair Discourse Theory present in a university's response to a severe campus crisis. The focus of the study is a medium-size private university located in the northeast United States at which a tragic dormitory fire took the lives of three students and injured nearly 60 others. The crisis received heavy local, state, and national media attention and resulted in serious political implications and repercussions for colleges throughout the university's home state and across the nation. Conducting a study focused on image repair discourse during a university crisis that received national media attention moves the analysis of campus crises from public relations tactics to the meaning of communication discourse. Such an exploration assists campus communicators and other administrators more effectively manage a crisis. It also helps to more precisely identify differences between a campus crisis and a corporate crisis. Repairing a university's image during and post-crisis may differ in meaningful ways from restoring product, brand or corporate image.

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Research Problem

In the last two decades, media coverage of colleges and universities has changed

significantly. News organizations have devoted less space to higher education,

diminishing its treatment as a "hot topic." In his analysis of the media, Footlick (1997)

tracks coverage of higher education from the 1960s through the late 1990s. He notes that,

while past coverage was serious and extensive, in recent years many education reporters

have been re-assigned. Other news organizations now emphasize brevity in educational

reporting. As an example, "editors of one of the country's leading newspapers told their

top education reporter that the paper would not run stories on higher education longer

than 1,500 words" (Footlick, 1997, p. 4). In addition, "many news organizations now

often report [higher education's] difficulties argumentatively, as if increasing tuition were

an administrative conspiracy against parents, or if professors who didn't teach three

classes a semester were deliberately cheating students" (Footlick, 1997, p. 4). In short,

coverage of higher education has become more investigative, aggressive, and similar to

coverage of corporations, politicians, and the entertainment industry (Maeroff, 1998).

In Ratcliff's (1995) study of how the press covers higher education and how public research universities work with the press to advance their agendas, reporters and editors provided a long list of reasons for "policing" public universities:

> They [editors and reporters] cited the significant sums of money universities receive from the state, the high salaries that university officials receive, the potential conflicts of interest involving researchers who market their discoveries, public concern regarding rising tuition, excessive privileges and top-heavy administrations, reliance on universities as engines of local economies, and a prevailing sense that governing boards are merely rubber stamps, rather than guardians of the public interest. (p.16)

Quite simply, the media have joined the growing chorus of constituents (among them parents, legislators, government officials, alumni, faculty, community members) seeking greater accountability from higher education institutions. Editors note that "newspapers' goals of policing universities are no different from their goals in policing other institutions – universities have just had a free ride" (Ratcliff, 1995, p. 16-17).

The intensity of media coverage of the university and amplified calls for universities to be accountable to internal and external publics are, perhaps, most evident during crises – low probability/high consequence "situations in which an organization is faced with a critical problem, experiences both sharp external pressure and bitter internal tensions, and is then brutally and for an extended period of time thrust to center stage…with the certainty of being at the top of the news on radio, television and in the press for a long time" (Lagadex, 1984, as cited in Ogrizek & Guillery, 1997, p. xvi). As opposed to a mere hot topic such as spiraling tuition costs, affirmative action, star

professors who rarely enter classrooms, and over-crowded lecture halls, crises form a point in an organization's history which irreversibly changes its culture and business (Murphy, 1996). Crises at a university may include accidents, crimes, racial tensions, financial issues, personnel concerns, questions about the integrity of research results, sports program conflicts/abuses, and more. The elements of a crisis common across most definitions include a threat to the organization, the factor of surprise, and a short decision time (Massey, 2001).

A university campus is typically a focal point of a city, and its crises could affect the entire community, including faculty, alumni, employees, students, parents, and potential students (Kennedy, 1999a).

[Colleges and universities] run the full gamut of activities performed by both economic and social institutions. They manage investments running into billions of dollars and maintain plants of comparable value. Many universities house and feed thousands of persons each day of the academic year. They operate hospitals and promote athletic spectacles. They manage art galleries, concert halls and theaters. They are complex business as well as teaching institutions. (Anderson, 1963, p. 533)

Over the past 5 years, the media have given comprehensive/investigative national coverage to major campus crisis events. To determine the scope of such coverage and to identify a potential focus for a case study, a Lexis-Nexis search was conducted of national newspapers including the *Los Angeles Times, New York Times, USA Today, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post,* and *Associated Press.* Three national magazines were also searched. These included *Newsweek, Time,* and *U.S. News & World Report.* The

search was confined to the time period of January 1, 1998, through January 1, 2002, and explored coverage of crises in which one or more students died. Search terms were "die(s)," "student(s)," "campus," and "college/university."

By far, the November 18, 1999, Texas A&M collapse of a bonfire structure – which left 12 people dead and 27 injured – received the greatest amount of national media attention during the time period analyzed, appearing in all of the outlets searched. A Seton Hall University dormitory fire in January 2000 that took the lives of three students and injured nearly 60 also received significant national attention, with extensive coverage from the *New York Times, USA Today, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Associated Press* and *Newsweek.*

Regional coverage of off-campus apartment fires and abundant coverage of alcohol-related student deaths appeared throughout the national press. During the time period examined, numerous stories focused on the binge drinking trend on college campuses, particularly the death of Scott Krueger at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in September 1997 in what *Newsweek* dubbed the most famous example of the troubling national trend of binge drinking. (Although the incident took place in 1997, it continued to receive considerable attention during the time period examined.) Heavy coverage was also devoted to the savage beating and death of University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard in 1998. Shepard, an openly gay man, was lashed to a fence post and left to die by two men (non-students) who espoused anti-gay sentiments.

Coverage by the *Associated Press* deserves special mention. Whereas a story in a daily newspaper or monthly news magazine appears in that particular publication (and potentially, on its Web site), it can be circulated by the *Associated Press* and can then

appear in various and numerous media outlets. Local, campus, regional, state, and national print media download and publish *Associated Press* stories to complement reports written by their own staff reporters. Once a story is reported on by the *Associated Press*, it can be "picked up" by any member publication. A majority of the 4,115 fire-related Seton Hall University stories that appeared in newspapers across the nation during the height of that crisis – from late January 2000 through April 2000 – were *Associated Press* stories. In short, *Associated Press* coverage of a campus crisis has the potential to communicate to people across the nation in their state, local, or campus newspapers.

How a university's public relations department responds during a crisis affects the institution's ability to restore its worth or "social legitimacy" in the various and diverse communities it serves and will potentially serve. Legitimacy is the perception that an organization's actions and responses are in line with social norms and beliefs (Massey, 2001). Organizations justify their missions and existence according to community norms and values. "A crisis [with potential to weaken social legitimacy] is likely to occur if an organization violates a deeply-established social norm or value regardless of whether the organization has technically broken the law" (Sellnow, Ulmer & Snider, 1998, p. 62). Organizations, therefore, work strategically to manage legitimacy in ways that their publics expect, placing institutional constraints on organizational behavior and communication (Massey, 2001).

"Organizations earn legitimacy when their activities reflect the values held" [by these communities] (Perrow, 1972 as cited in Sellnow, Ulmer & Snider, 1998, p. 65). In the media glare during a crisis, the expectations for universities to justify their reactions and responses in terms of prevailing norms are particularly intense. During these times,

legitimacy management – the process whereby organizations attempt to gain, regain, or maintain stakeholder support for an organization's actions – is critical (Massey, 2001). Often, however, universities are unprepared for the public scrutiny a crisis provokes, and their communications can violate established social norms. The price paid for lack of proper crisis communication includes decreased organizational credibility, a weakened reputation, and renewed efforts by the press to more aggressively investigate campus issues/actions. If not handled correctly, crises can stick to a university in media reports long after crisis events. Notes Zelizer (1993, in Ratcliff, 1995), "even though incidents took place a few years ago, reporters and editors recount[ed] their occurrences to uphold their professional ideology and affirm their practices of policing" universities (p. 16).

To maintain or regain legitimacy during and after a crisis, "organizations must engage in a discourse with their public(s) that provides adequate justification for whatever actions are under scrutiny" (Strauss, 1982; Turkel, 1982, as cited in Sellnow, Ulmer & Snider, 1998, p. 62). This discourse may be suggested via a crisis communication plan. A crisis communication plan is a document that provides a practical framework for communication when a crisis occurs and that incorporates the tactical "lessons learned" from similar institutions/organizations that have faced crisis events in the past. Such plans are developed prior to crisis events and in anticipation of the emergency, organizational and communication-related responsibilities of an organization in crisis. A typical campus crisis communication plan provides policies and procedures for the coordination of communication within the university, and with the media and the institution's publics in the event of an emergency or controversial issue. The value of a crisis communication plan to corporations is well established in the communication

literature (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1995; Hendrix, 1998; Newson, Turk & Kruckeberg, 2000; Seitel, 2001; Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, & Agee, 2003). Several researchers (Seeger & Barton, 2001; Seeger, Barton, Heyart & Bultnyck, in press) have explored crisis communication planning at elementary and high schools. Although some writers (Kennedy, 1999b; Wilson, 1992) note the need for colleges and universities to develop crisis communication plans, just how many institutions have such plans in place is not known. Little additional insight on university crisis planning is gained from today's leading crisis communication professionals. Larry Smith, president of the Institute for Crisis Management noted that the Institute "had not formally studied the issue, but [that] based on calls from colleges and universities, very few have a crisis communication plan…and most haven't even thought about it" (personal communication, September 27, 2001). According to Hill and Knowlton's Crisis Team (personal communication, August 14, 2001) "public relations and communication planning at most colleges remains focused on fund raising…even recent, major campus tragedies have not sent a wake-up call."

While little has been examined regarding crisis communication planning in higher education, even less analysis has been conducted regarding universities' actual communication during and after a crisis event – or what in the crisis communication literature is referred to as image restoration discourse, the theoretical foundation for crisis communication (Coombs, 2000). Image Restoration Discourse Theory centers on what an organization says and what information it disseminates during a crisis. The theory organizes image repair strategies into five broad categories: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. The

examination of image restoration discourse "is more exhaustive than earlier theories on which it builds" (Benoit, 1997, p. 178). It provides "message options" (Benoit, 1997, p. 178) and speaks to the understanding that "every crisis is also a crisis of information ... and that failure to control the crisis of information results in failure to control the crisis, including its directly operational aspects" (Scanlon, 1975 as cited in Ogrizek & Guillery, 1999).

Over the last decade, several researchers (Benoit, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Benoit & Hanczor, 1994; Brinson, 1999; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; and Sellnow, Ulmer, & Snider, 1998) have conducted case studies using Image Restoration Discourse Theory to carefully and comprehensively examine corporate crises that ranged from poisoned products to accusations of racism. The typology has been employed to critically analyze crisis communication efforts in a variety of contexts, including corporate, political, sports, and entertainment. Although Foolick (1997) traces a variety of campus crises in his book *Truth and Consequences*, nothing in the literature specifically applies Image Restoration Discourse Theory to university or college crises. This is despite the fact that institutions such as universities that are highly dependent on favorable environmental/community relations typically emphasize legitimation strategies (Seeger, 1986 as cited by Massey, 2001).

Randal Quevillon, psychologist of the University of South Dakota's Disaster Mental Health Institute, notes that "crises change us and our campuses – not just for a while but, in some ways, forever. They become part of our institutional identity, our history, our memory" (Quevillon, as cited in Erickson, 2002, p. 1). Tracking how image restoration discourse evolves during a campus crisis to identify potential best practices

will contribute significantly to the efforts of universities to restore social legitimacy post crisis. Such a study is particularly urgent during a time period when calls for accountability have intensified.

Using Image Restoration Discourse Theory to examine a university's response to a crisis can help move the analysis of campus crises from public relations tactics to the meaning of communication discourse. Such exploration can assist campus communicators and other administrators in more effectively managing a crisis. It can identify communication approaches that should be avoided and those that should be considered as part of the university's crisis response. It may also help to more precisely identify differences between a campus crisis and a corporate crisis. Restoring a university's image during and post crisis may differ in meaningful ways from restoring product, brand or corporate image. Most insightful would be a study of a campus crisis that received national media attention. While local and state press coverage can not be discounted, national media attention increases the perceived importance of the crisis event and extends the reach of negative publicity.

While most campus crises are covered strictly by local and state media, large scale crises – particularly those in which a student or students die – are more likely to garner national media attention. While colleges and universities covet positive national media attention, every effort is made to avoid negative national "ink." Negative coverage can create a long-term association of the university with the "bad" news. This, it is feared, can deter potential applicants, worry students, and concern parents, donors, and alumni.

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the elements of Image Restoration Discourse Theory present in a university response during and after one of the

most severe campus crises -- one in which students die. Specifically, the study focuses on a crisis at Seton Hall University, a Catholic University of 10,000 students located in South Orange, New Jersey. At 4:30 a.m. on January 19, 2000, an intense fire broke out in the common room on the fourth floor of Boland Hall, a six-story freshmen residence hall housing 640 students on the campus. Although the fire was extinguished quickly, it left three male 18-year-old freshmen dead, five critically injured, and nearly 60 hospitalized for injuries ranging from burns to smoke inhalation.

The tragedy ignited a public relations crisis unprecedented in the university's 144-year history. On the morning of the fire, hundreds of television, radio, and print reporters and news crews dashed to campus. The then Archbishop of Newark Theodore McCarrick rushed from his residence to the scene and (former) New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman arrived by helicopter. Images of the fire scene and of shocked, saddened students wrapped in blankets walking through campus became front page news in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. Regular reports of the fire were broadcast beginning at 5:30 a.m. on local and national networks, including CNN, NBC, ABC and CBS. The day after the fire, an *Associated Press* story about the fire ran prominently in more than 200 papers across the nation – from *The Record Gazette* in Banning, California to *The Finger Lake Times* in Geneva, New York. In the story, United States President Bill Clinton called the fire a "terrible tragedy...our hearts go out to the families of the students who died and were injured. Know that everyone at Seton Hall is in our thoughts and prayers."

Seton Hall's response to the fire inspired a national debate about sprinkler systems in college dormitories and the danger of "prank" fire alarms. Although equipped

with properly performing smoke alarms, pull stations and fire extinguishers, Boland Hall was built prior to 1991 and so was not required to have a sprinkler system. In fact, the *Associated Press* (Stashenko, 2000) reported on January 24, 2000 that nearly 67% of the nation's campuses with residence halls are not fully equipped with sprinkler systems.

According to Burrelle's Public Relations Evaluation Services, 4,115 fire-related Seton Hall stories appeared in newspapers across the nation from late January 2000 through April 2000. Circulation for these papers is estimated at 436,657,479. The advertising equivalent of the print space dedicated to the fire was valued at more than $6 million. Fire-related radio and television stories numbered 3,654 from late January 2000 through April 2000 with gross audience estimated at 423,546,661. The advertising equivalent of this air time was valued at $17,245,016.

The impact of the Seton Hall fire extended well beyond the university's own image. It inspired national discussion of dormitory safety. Shortly after the Seton Hall fire, New York Governor George Pataki appointed a task force to compile a report on fire safety at college dormitories in his state. Massachusetts and Pennsylvania officials announced plans in 2000 to install sprinklers in dormitories and on public college campuses. Wisconsin enacted a law that mandated the retrofitting of all University of Wisconsin high-rise dormitories with fire safety systems by 2006 and the installation of sprinklers in all dormitories regardless of height. Kentucky installed sprinklers and other fire safety systems in its dormitories following a 1998 fire at Murray State that took the life of one student (Stashenko, 2000). New Jersey's governor in 2000, Christie Todd Whitman, signed into law (on July 5, 2000) a bill requiring all colleges in the state to install dormitory sprinkler systems within 4 years. New Jersey's Dormitory Safety Trust

Fund Act deemed the "construction, reconstruction, development, extension and improvement of dormitory safety facilities, including fire prevention and sprinkler systems," in the public interest and a public purpose. The legislation made automatic fire suppression systems a requirement in dormitories and led to facility changes and budgetary challenges on campuses throughout New Jersey. The Maine and Connecticut legislatures considered similar laws.

Campus Firewatch, an organization that gathers information about, reports on, and works to prevent campus fires, details the status of legislation regarding fire safety in dormitories on its Web site at campus-firewatch.com. According to Campus Firewatch, 13 state bills and four federal campus fire safety bills were proposed in 2001-2002. Among the pending federal legislation is the Campus Fire Safety Right-to-Know Act, which would require institutions of higher education to submit an annual fire safety report to the United States Secretary of Education that includes information on sprinklers and other fire safety systems in campus buildings, details on incidents of fires and false alarms, and a report on injuries, deaths, and structural damage (Campbell, 2001).

This study will identify and describe the elements of Image Restoration Discourse Theory present in Seton Hall University's efforts to repair its social legitimacy during and after its significant crisis event - one that received national media attention. Conducting a study focused on Image Restoration Discourse Theory during and after a university crisis in the national spotlight moves the analysis of campus crises from public relations tactics to the meaning of communication discourse. Such an exploration can assist campus communicators and other administrators in more effectively managing a crisis. It may also help to more precisely identify differences between a campus crisis and

a corporate crisis. Restoring a university's image during and post crisis may differ in important ways from restoring product, brand or corporate image.

## The Research Question

What element(s) of Image Restoration Discourse Theory were present in Seton Hall University's response to the tragic January 2000 dormitory fire that took the lives of three students and injured more than 60?

## Subsidiary Questions

1.  In what ways did Seton Hall University's crisis communication plan at the time of the fire incorporate image restoration discourse?

2.  Why were certain elements of image restoration discourse viewed as positive, negative, or neutral in Seton Hall University's response during and after its crisis?

3.  What source(s) of information influenced the opinions of the campus community about the Seton Hall University crisis?

4.  How did corrective action influence the opinion of members of the campus community regarding Seton Hall University's image during and after the Seton Hall University fire?

5. What role if any does the campus community believe that acts of remembrance/memorials contribute to image restoration after Seton Hall University's campus crisis?

Definition of Terms

1. *Crisis*: A low probability/high consequence situation in which an organization is faced with a critical problem, experiences both sharp external pressure and bitter internal tensions, and is then brutally and for an extended period of time thrust to center stage with the certainty of being at the top of the news on radio, television and in the press for an extended period of time. A crisis, whether it is an event, rumor or news story, has the potential to affect an organization's reputation, credibility and image in a negative way. Three common elements of a crisis include: a threat to an organization, the factor of surprise, and a short decision time.

2. *Social Legitimacy*: The perception among various and diverse communities served by an institution that the institution's activities reflect the values held by these communities; the perception that the organization is good, credible and honest, and has a right to continue.

3. *Image*: The perception of the source of communication held by the audience, shaped by the words and acts of the source and influenced by other actors salient to the source.

4. *Communication Discourse*: What an organization says (oral communication) and what information it outputs (written communication) when faced with a crisis.

5. *Image Restoration/Repair Discourse Theory*: Image Repair Discourse Theory centers on what an organization says and what information it outputs when faced with a crisis. Image repair strategies are organized into five broad categories: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, mortification, and corrective action. Burns and Bruner (2000) have recommended a revision to the name of the theory, replacing

"restoration" with "repair" to more clearly communicate that an image can never return to the state that it was in prior to the crisis.

6. *Corrective Action*: Voluntary remedial attempts to repair existing damages and/or to prevent future recurrence of a wrongful act rather than compensation. Corrective action taken and publicized shows publics that a significant change has been made, that measures have been taken so that a similar crisis does not occur in the future.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature on crisis communication has evolved from how-to steps, to crisis stages, to case study explorations, to image restoration discourse. Image Restoration Discourse Theory centers on what an organization says and what information it outputs when faced with a crisis. The examination of image restoration discourse "is more exhaustive than earlier theories on which it builds" (Benoit, 1997, p. 178). It provides "message options" (Benoit, 1997, p. 178) and speaks to the understanding that "every crisis is also a crisis of information ... and that failure to control the crisis of information results in failure to control the crisis, including its directly operational aspects" (Scanlon, 1975 as cited in Ogrizek & Guillery, 1999, p. xvi). A focus on the discourse of crisis – information and communication – seems most appropriately matched to the core university value of information sharing.

Image Restoration Discourse Theory

According to Image Restoration Discourse Theory, image repair strategies are organized into five broad categories: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, mortification, and corrective action.

*Denial*

When a wrongful act occurs, the accused organization can deny that it occurred or deny that the organization performed it. In theory, if the denial is accepted, the organization's image is repaired. Brinson and Benoit (1996) discuss Dow Corning's use of denial through much of its crisis regarding silicone breast implants. Although Dow

Corning eventually switched to more effective image restoration tactics, it continually asserted that its product was safe. Mangan's (1999) report on a series of events that triggered accusations of racism and sexism at Stanford Law School includes examples of the denial strategy at work in a university setting. The crisis issue at Stanford Law School stemmed from the resignation of one of five minority professors (out of the law school's 40 faculty members) due to what the resigning professor (as cited in Mangan, 1999) categorized as a "hostile climate for women and people of color" (p. A12). Although [then] Dean Paul Brest (as cited in Mangan, 1999) (who was later replaced by the first woman dean in the law school's history) said "he could not discuss the details of the case," he told a gathering of Stanford alumni that the professor's charges were "unfounded."

A subset of denial is shifting the blame, a tactic used in an attempt to refocus attention elsewhere or suggesting that another person or organization is responsible for the crisis events (Brinson & Benoit, 1996). Shifting the blame is evident in Exxon's response to the 1989 Valdez disaster, in which a 987-foot oil tanker ran aground, spilling 260,000 barrels of crude oil in the waters of Prince William Sound. The spill affected 1,300 square miles of water, damaging more than 600 miles of coastline, and killing as many as 4,000 Alaskan sea otters (Seitel, 2001). After the spill, Lawrence G. Rawl, chairman and chief executive of the Exxon Corporation, attempted to shift responsibility for a slow response and clean-up to state officials and the Coast Guard (Benoit, 1997).

Brinson and Benoit (1994) note that some evidence suggests that "denial and shifting the blame are not considered by those who are injured by the [corporation's or individual's] actions to be as appropriate or effective as other potential image restoration

strategies" in restoring social legitimacy (p. 87). Sellnow, Ulmer, and Snider (1998) offer a comprehensive explanation for why avoiding or delaying the acceptance of responsibility results in such a hard hit to an organization's ability to repair its social legitimacy. The researchers note that Dow Corning's initial denial of responsibility extended its image crisis and that it was only after the company altered its approach that social legitimacy began to return. "An unwillingness to accept responsibility or to engage in significant corrective action during critical period of crises serves to intensify damage done to public image" (Sellnow, Ulmer, & Snider, 1998, p. 61).

A denial of wrongdoing and/or responsibility for a crisis situation is, of course, often a strategy preferred by corporate lawyers (Seitel, 2001). Fear that statements of responsibility will return to haunt corporations in court battles can prevent organizations from moving past denial. The damage to social legitimacy that results from denial, however, and the benefits of corrective action (which expresses regret rather than guilt) is why denial is not frequently a preferred image restoration strategy.

*Evading Responsibility*

Rather than denial, an organization may attempt to restore its image by evading responsibility for a crisis, or developing excuses for the occurrence. Brinson and Benoit (1999) describe four subcategories of evasion of responsibility: provocation, defeasibility, accidents, and good intentions:

> Provocation suggests that the wrongdoing was a response to previous
> wrongful acts that provoked the offender. Defeasibility argues that lack of
> information or control over events caused the wrongful act. The strategy
> called accidents points to unforeseeable circumstances as a self-defense

strategy. Finally, the accused could use good intentions as an evasion

strategy. This option presents the rhetor's praiseworthy motives as a way

to reduce responsibility for a wrongful act. (p. 3)

*Reducing Offensiveness*

A third option in response to crisis is attempting to reduce the offensiveness of the

act. This strategy includes six variations. The first, bolstering, uses positive comments in

the hope of strengthening the public's opinion about the organization. Corporations and

universities use bolstering when they describe offensive acts/crises scenarios as

"unacceptable" or "never tolerated here." This kind of image repair strategy is used

frequently to defend an institution's image in light of charges of racism or sexism.

Texaco repeatedly used bolstering in its initial response to accusations that management

was racist (Brinson & Benoit, 1999). The company explained that "discriminatory

behavior is prohibited by Texaco's 'clear and vigorously-enforced policies against

discrimination' and discriminatory behavior violates the 'company's core values and

principles'" (Brinson & Benoit, 1999, p. 4). Bolstering is most effective in restoring

social legitimacy when messages emphasize the values held by and cultural expectations

of the publics and shared by the institution.

A second subcategory of reducing offensiveness is minimization, an attempt to

reduce the offensiveness of the act/crisis by downplaying negative outcomes of the crisis.

When the Education Department found Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State

University in violation of parts of a law requiring it to report campus crime (Lively,

1997), the university minimized the findings in statements calling the results "kind of

elementary and nit-picking in nature." The university stance was that the Education

Department was simply saying "Please be sure in the future that your reporting is more accurate" (Lively, 1997, p. A28). The complaint against Virginia Tech came from a student who charged she was raped by two football players. The crime was not included in the school's published crime report.

Organizations can also use differentiation to reduce offensiveness. This tactic requires institutions to present examples of similar issues but those that feature more severe harm. Following Stanford Law School's denial of racism and sexism charges, a subsequent crisis emerged over an anonymous e-mail attack on the qualifications of a visiting professor. In this case, Dean Brest used differentiation as his image restoration strategy, "criticizing students for resorting to 'mob hysteria' and ignoring the student's constitutional right" of free speech (Mangan, 1999, p. A12).

Although not discussed in the literature, this researcher suggests that universities and colleges engage in a type of differentiation when they cite a "growing trend" as the root of a crisis situation. An alcohol-related death may, for instance, be positioned as an example of a greater/nationwide alcohol or drug problem. When a University of Michigan engineering student died in November 2000 after trying to drink 20 shots of Scotch whiskey in 10 minutes, for instance, the school provost noted that "this could happen to any student. This is not a student who was normally drinking to excess this way." Placing further emphasis on a national/growing trend, the university's vice president of student affairs [E. Royster Harper] said, "The 21st birthday celebration that has developed on other campuses has come to our own" (as cited in Enders, 2000, paragraph 10). Clearly, university use of differentiation by citing a larger trend deserves further investigation.

A fourth way to reduce offensiveness is through transcendence, or highlighting the greater good that comes from the organization's actions. Lastly, an organization in crisis can attack the accuser or offer/give compensation – striking back or making up (Benoit, 1997).

*Mortification*

The fourth major category of image repair discourse is mortification, or admitting to the act, asking forgiveness, and apologizing. As noted by Benoit and Brinson (1994) in their analysis of AT&T's response to long distance service interruption in New York in 1991, the act of mortification helps to restore social legitimacy by conveying a "strong sense of security. It is neither easy nor pleasant to confess responsibility for the suffering of others" (p. 83). Doing so makes the communicator appear honest and trustworthy. Society holds people and organizations responsible for their actions. A sincere apology shows acceptance of this responsibility. "Burke discusses the purgative-guilt cycle, in which humans inevitably violate the social order, requiring redemption" (Beniot & Brinson, 1994, p. 87). Mortification is a primary means of symbolically killing the guilt. Although usually explicit, mortification/regret can be implied from corrective action taken after a crisis (Sellnow, Ulmer & Snider, 1998).

*Corrective Action*

The final category of Image Restoration Theory is identified in the literature as corrective action, which "attempts to repair existing damages and/or to prevent future recurrence of the wrongful act" (Brinson & Benoit, 1999, p. 3). Sellnow, Ulmer and Snider (1998) examined corrective action as an initial and primary means of restoring an organization's public image, finding that "taking some degree of responsibility for the

crisis during critical periods and providing corrective action can expedite the organization's efforts to rebuild its legitimacy" (p. 61). Companies that fail to accept responsibility can intensify their image problems. Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) explain that, "unlike compensation, which seeks to pay for a problem, corrective action seeks to prevent or correct" (p. 45). Corrective action means making real, long-term changes within an organization. An example of corrective action at a university is the monetary settlement and security changes following an alleged 1998 campus rape at the University of New Mexico. In February 2000, the university agreed to make "modest financial payment" to the rape victim and continue her scholarship for the next 3 years. Most significantly, the settlement provided for "major changes in security on the University of New Mexico campus and, at the victim's request, the university agreed to take certain proactive steps to reduce the likelihood of a rape occurring in the future" (Zoretich, 2000, p. A3). After several troubling incidents involving racism at San Jose State University, corrective action took the form of a comprehensive Campus Climate Plan designed to nurture an effective climate for diverse student populations (Simmons, 1999). The plan:

> ... made anti-bias initiatives a top priority. The Campus Climate program immediately appointed an Emergency Response Team and unveiled procedures that spell out supervisory personnel duties for responding to incidents which might take place [aka: a crisis communication plan]. No longer, according to university officials, would anyone on campus attempt to sweep things under the rug. (p. 36)

The university has assembled several ethnic community advisory committees, provided professional development to assist faculty in promoting culturally sensitive education,

and designed workshops for nontraditional and second-language students. And San Jose University is witnessing "tangible effects" of success. "There haven't been any more troubling racial confrontations on campus. Students communicate more with faculty and administration. And more people of color now hold management roles" (Simmons, 1999, p. 36).

The image restoration discourse literature clearly highlights the assumption that organizations facing crises must take some degree of responsibility if they hope to restore their social legitimacy. Corrective action speeds up this process (Sellnow, Ulmer, & Snider, 1998). Corrective action taken and publicized shows publics that a significant change has been made, that measures have been taken so that a similar crisis does not occur in the future. Corrective action is not compensation (which may imply guilt). It is a voluntary remedial response. Such a response – one that addresses the core concerns brought to light by the crisis and moves to deter similar events – can "enhance a perception of preventive, long-term change and renewed social legitimacy" (Sellnow & Seeger, 1989, p. 17). Sellnow, Ulmer, and Snider (1998) note that corrective action is an appropriate and effective response even when the organization is not considered responsible for the crisis. As evidence of this, the researchers (Sellnow, Ulmer, & Snider,1998) point to the success of the Johnson and Johnson Company during its Tylenol poisoning crisis. Although Johnson and Johnson did not take responsibility for the poisoning, it voluntarily took the corrective actions of removing the product from store shelves and later of changing the product design and product packaging.

Consideration of corrective action must, of course, include recognition of legal consequences. Ultimately, writes Benoit (1997), organizations "must decide whether it is

more important to restore image or avoid litigation" (p. 183). Another consideration is

resources. Corrective action will not be effective and, in fact, should not be considered if

the organization does not have the financial resources to pay for corrective measures. A

final consideration focuses on the impact of the crisis. If the impact is contained (ie: a fire

that results in a certain number of injuries), well known (ie: salmonella is identified in a

product, but the infection is understood and treatable), or avoidable (ie: a syringe in a can

of cola can be avoided by pouring the liquid into a glass), corrective action can contribute

to the restoration of social legitimacy. If, as in Down Corning's case, the full impact of

the crisis will not be known for many years, "immediate correction action has little

impact" (Sellnow & Seeger, 1989, p. 69).

Several crisis communication "morals" are evident from the exploration of image

restoration strategies. Some of the advice is applicable to persuasion in general: "avoid

false claims, provide adequate support for claims, develop themes throughout the

campaign, and avoid arguments that backfire" (Benoit, 1997, p. 183). Benoit (1997)

provides other key crisis response lessons, including, admitting fault when at fault and

reporting plans to correct and/or prevent recurrence of the problem. Officials at Duke

University learned this first hand in late 1999 after an alcohol-related death of a junior.

Originally, the university told Duke students that the student died of bacterial pneumonia.

Officials did not mention that the infection occurred after the student inhaled his own

vomit after a night of heavy drinking. When a second student's life was threatened in

similar circumstances, Duke acknowledged the role alcohol had played in the initial and

subsequent crisis. Not admitting the facts resulted in a public disclosure from the

university's President Nan Kephane. She said,

In retrospect, we should have been more aggressive in our response at the outset, less sensitive to the immediate tragedy perhaps and more sensitive to the long-term implications of this particular death. We should have talked openly about this in December, bringing home the shocking import of this death as a cautionary tale for others, while the emotional wounds were still fresh. (Kephane, as cited by Stroup, 2000, paragraph 4)

Other strategies such as shifting the blame and defeasibility can also be constructive if well planned. After an investigation of its poisoned capsules, Tylenol successfully shifted blame to an unknown person (it followed with voluntary corrective action). Related to this is the strategy of defeasibility. Exxon, for example, could have done a better job of stressing poor ocean conditions for problems with its [oil spill] clean-up. These factors beyond Exxon's control "could have alleviated responsibility and helped restore a tarnished image" (Benoit, 1997, p. 184).

Clearly, image restoration strategies must be carefully matched to the specific crisis situation and audiences affected. They must also be used with an understanding that powers of persuasion are limited. No one strategy or combination of strategies is best in all situations. What is important, however, is that communicators consider Image Restoration Discourse Theory in their corporate communication crisis plans. Without an understanding of how others have applied these strategies to publicly recover from crisis situations, communicators and their organizations risk considerable damage to their image.

*Refining and Expanding Image Restoration Discourse Theory*

Over the last decade, several researchers (Benoit, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Benoit & Hanczor, 1994; Brinson, 1999; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; and Sellnow, Ulmer, & Snider, 1998) have conducted case studies using Image Restoration Discourse Theory to carefully and comprehensively examine corporate crises that range from poisoned products to accusations of racism. The typology has been employed to critically analyze crisis communication efforts in a variety of contexts, including corporate, political, sports, and entertainment. Although Footlick (1997) traces a variety of campus crises in his book *Truth and Consequences*, nothing was found in the literature that specifically applies Image Restoration Discourse Theory to university or college crises. Benoit, the theory's founder, and others (Burns & Bruner, 2000) recommend exploration of the theory in new contexts. They suggest applying the theory to crises faced by a larger variety of institutions and by institutions in the context of the Internet.

In a 2000 article revisiting Image Restoration Discourse Theory, Burns and Bruner note the "considerable attention" paid to the "typology of strategies" – attention that demonstrates "the theory's usefulness and credibility." They do, however, make several suggestions for refining and expanding the theory. A key recommendation is for future researchers to take a more audience-centric approach to the study of the theory. In any crisis, several different audiences with different interests exist. Moffitt's (1994) work clearly points to the value of audience, stressing that image is not dictated by the source of communication. Rather, image is a byproduct of the communication recipient's processing of several elements, including organizational, environmental, historical, cultural, and personal factors. The most influential factors determining image in her study were doing business with the company, the views of family members and friends, and

messages retrieved from the media (Moffitt, 1994). Burns and Bruner (2000) advise that future researchers emphasize the importance and diversity of audiences, and suggest that future studies make a greater attempt to determine the audiences' reaction to the messages of those who are attempting to repair their images, to examine more closely such audience response measures as media attention, boycott activity and effect on stock prices. In his response to the Burns and Bruner (2000) review piece, Benoit (2000) refutes any suggestion that his work is not focused on audience perceptions, yet he reiterates the vital role audiences and their perceptions have on crisis outcomes.

Burns and Bruner (2000) also urge future researchers to note the importance of other signs of discourse in their image restoration investigations. They recommend that future studies place greater emphasis on communication vehicles such as slogans, nonverbal messages, and ideographs. The researchers (Burns & Bruner, 2000) note that while they "do not expect the theory of Image Restoration Discourse to abandon verbal and print accounts, excuses and apologies," they hope that more flexibility can be build into future studies to "accommodate slogans, ideographs, truncated arguments, and the nonverbal aspects of image re-creation" (p. 32). Considering university crises, for instance, it may be valuable to contemplate and track the restorative power of remembrance ceremonies, memorials, and other nonverbal tributes/messages. Such an investigation links to Bolman and Deal's (1991) symbolic frame of reference for leading institutions of higher learning during stressful times.

Burns and Bruner (2000) also make several observations about improving the process of assessing the outcome of the various elements of image restoration. In fact, they characterize the challenge of documenting and measuring effects as "confounding"

and note that "the theory of Image Restoration Discourse may oversimplify the assessment of effectiveness" (p. 34). In the body of knowledge on Image Restoration Discourse Theory, a variety of evidence has been used to measure effectiveness of image restoration techniques. Outcomes have been determined by tracking public opinion poll results and by making comparisons of sales data and stock prices pre- and post-crisis. Researchers have also tracked the effectiveness of image restoration techniques by monitoring the rise and fall of newspaper coverage of crisis events and recovery. Burns and Bruner (2000) recommend that media tracking, while a "proven method for documenting effects," must grow in sophistication. Rather than simply count media mentions, for instance, the suggestion is made that analyses include "rating the reputation of the newspaper, establishing the size of the newspaper's readership, measuring column inches, and assessing the valence of the story" (p. 36). Rather than track statements in the press, the recommendation is made to employ in-depth interviews with key people involved in the crisis response.

> In addition, diverse and more precise measures of effectiveness may help in some cases. For example, focus group interviews (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000, p. 219-220) provide a mechanism for listening to consumers. Moffitt (1994) reports using both a survey study and ethnography. Our positive suggestion is to employ the triangulation of research methods. (Burns & Bruner, 2000, p. 35)

In addition to these refinements, Burns and Bruner (2000) recommend a revision to the name of the theory, replacing "restoration" with "repair" to more clearly communicate that an image can never return to the state that it was in prior to the crisis.

Beniot (2000) acknowledges that he too "now tend[s] to prefer image 'repair' to 'image restoration'" (p. 40).

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Image Restoration Discourse Theory provides the theoretical framework to analyze Seton Hall University's use of image repair strategies during and after its 2000 crisis. The theory's typology of approaches has received considerable attention in the communication literature, convincingly demonstrating its usefulness and credibility (Burns & Bruner, 2000). This particular theory is used because, although it is widely found in the communication literature to analyze and learn from crisis events, it has never been applied to a crisis at an institution of higher education. Restoring a university's image during and after a crisis may differ in meaningful ways from restoring product, brand or corporate image.

## A Case Study

The case study, the initial method of analysis in this study, is an appropriate method of investigation for several reasons. First, previous analyses of Image Restoration Discourse Theory in the communication literature utilize the case study method. Doing so in this study will ensure that accurate comparisons are made to findings regarding the crisis response strategies used by other institutions. Although a variety of approaches exist with which to conduct interpretative research (such as ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory), the case study is an appropriate form of qualitative research for the exploration of a "single entity or phenomenon (the case) bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group)"

(Creswell, 1994, p. 12 as cited by Ertmer, 1997). Case studies can be conducted to study multiple cases or a single unique or one exceptional case. The Seton Hall University case is exceptional, serving as an example of a university experiencing a severe crisis while in the spotlight of the national media attention. The political and institutional repercussions of the case further underscore its unique and exceptional characteristics.

Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) note that "researchers generally do case studies for one of three purposes: to produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon, to develop possible explanations of it, or to evaluate the phenomenon" (p. 549). The purpose of this case study, to identify and describe the elements of Image Restoration Discourse Theory present in Seton Hall University's response to the tragic January 2000 dormitory fire that took the lives of three students and injured more than 60 students, lends itself to an explanatory case study.

Gall et al. (1996) and Ertmer (1997) describe three approaches to the analysis of case study data. Interpretational analysis refers to

> ... examining the data for constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the event studied. Structural analysis refers to searching the data for patterns inherent in discourse, text, events, or other phenomena, with little or no inference make as to the meaning of patterns. Reflective analysis refers to using primarily intuition and judgement to portray or evaluate the phenomenon. (Ertmer, 1997, p. 158)

Data analysis for this study will be interpretational and reflective. Data will be interpreted to describe the event and, more specifically, identify patterns of image restoration

discourse. Reflective analysis will be used to evaluate the use of image restoration strategies and evaluate the outcome of various elements of the theory.

## Focus Groups and Interviews

All studies require a substantial amount of data gathering from a wide variety of sources in order to present a detailed description of the experience under investigation. Recommendations made by researchers, specifically and most recently Burns and Bruner (2000), further extend the spectrum of potential data sources for an investigation of Image Restoration Discourse Theory. This study will incorporate suggestions made to enrich the depth of sources used to investigate elements and outcomes of image restoration discourse.

More specifically, the present study takes a more audience-centric approach to the study of the Image Restoration Discourse Theory, as suggested by Burns and Bruner (2000). It features in-depth interviews with those in charge of the communication effort at Seton Hall University and focus groups with alumni, key recipients of the University's crisis response messages. As Burns and Bruner (2000) advise, the present study will make a greater attempt to determine the audiences' reaction to the messages of the organization attempting to restore its images. The present study will also, as Burns and Bruner (2000) suggest, explore the importance of other signs of discourse in image repair, placing greater emphasis on communication vehicles such as nonverbal messages and events. While it does not abandon verbal and print accounts, excuses and apologies, this study considers the value of memorials, remembrance ceremonies, and other nonverbal tributes/messages. An investigation into remembrance symbols links to Bolman and Deal's (1991) symbolic frame of reference for leading institutions of higher

learning during stressful times. Finally, the present study seeks to diversify measurements of the effectiveness of image restoration discourse. As recommended by Burns and Bruner (2000), in addition to tracking press statement, it employs in-depth interviews and focus groups with key people involved in the crisis response as a mechanism for listening to key audience members.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

Data collected in case studies includes words, images or physical objects. All were gathered for the case study regarding Seton Hall's crisis. More precisely, data collection was divided into four categories: (a) information output by the communicator/Seton Hall University, (b) externally produced communication that provides insight into audience perception of the University's communication, (c) information gathered from in-depth interviews with top campus administrators at the time of the fire, and (d) information gathered from three focus group interviews with a random sample of alumni living in New Jersey at the time of the fire. Information gathered from in-depth interviews with administrators and from the three focus groups with alumni was further analyzed as it related to each subsidiary question.

Data collected in the first category included the following material produced by the University from the day of the event, January 19, 2000 through the end of Seton Hall's spring 2002 semester: (a) Official statements made by the University, (b) Press releases distributed by the University, (c) Video tapes of all official press conferences, (d) Symbols introduced, established, and promoted by the University, (e) Web copy generated by the University, and (f) Crisis reports produced internally that are now public record.

Data collected in the second category included: (a) Local, state and national media reports of the event and University response (during the January 19, 2000 - May 2002 time frame) gathered via a Lexis-Nexis search, and (b) Results of an independent Reputation Impact Study conducted after the crisis by Lipman Hearne, an independent public relations firm. Permission has been received on September 30, 2002 from Susan Diamond, Assistant Vice President of University Relations, to obtain the results of the study.

In-depth interviews, the third category of data collection, were conducted with a purposeful sample of 10 University administrators most directly involved with Seton Hall's crisis response and communication. Individuals with front line roles in planning, managing, and evaluating Seton Hall University's response to the dormitory fire were identified for the researcher by Mary Meehan, the University's former Executive Vice President of Administration, on August 7, 2002. Input from these individuals was essential to the University's image restoration discourse, which is defined in the literature as what the organization said and what information it output when faced with the crisis. Gathering data from top administrators enables the researcher to respond to critics' calls for employment of in-depth interviews with key people involved in the crisis response (Burns & Bruner, 2000). It also deepens the researcher's interpretational analysis of the data for constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the event studied as well has the reflective analysis of the use of image restoration strategies and evaluation of the outcome of various elements of the theory and subsidiary questions.

In-depth interviews with administrators were conducted individually due to the serious difficulty involved with scheduling 10 executive level administrators for one

group session. Each administrator identified as a potential interview candidate received a letter from the researcher (see Appendix A) stating the purpose of the study, requesting participation, suggesting interview dates and times, and including sample questions. Potential interview participants were asked to call or e-mail the researcher to arrange a convenient date and time for the interview.

The purposeful sample for the in-depth interviews included the follow individuals (more than 10 are listed to account for those who may have chosen not to participate): (a) Dennis Garbini, Vice President, Finance and Technology, (b) Lisa Grider, Former Assistant Vice President, Alumni and University Relations, (c) Craig Allen, Director of Housing, (d) Paul Huegal, Former Executive Director of Pirate Blue, (e) Rev. Paul A. Holmes, Vice President, Mission and Ministry, (f) Patricia Burgh House, Former Director, Institutional Image Campaign, (g) Mike McMahon, Former Director of Security, (h) Mary Meehan, Former Executive Vice President, Administration, (i) Rev. Robert Meyer, Associate Vice President, Student Affairs, (j) Gail Pakalns, Director, University Counseling Services, (k) Laura Palmer, Professor, College of Education/Human Services, Department of Counseling Psychology and Family Therapy, (l) John H. Shannon, Former Vice President, University Affairs, (m) Monsignor Robert Sheeran, University President, (n) James Van Oosting, Former Dean, College of Arts & Science, and (o) Laura A. Wankel, Vice President, Student Affairs

Questions for the in-depth interviews were created based on the study's research questions and subsidiary questions and center on the University's use of various elements of the Image Restoration Discourse Theory. All in-depth interview questions were reviewed by two of the leading experts on image restoration discourse, Dr. William

Benoit and Dr. Susan Brinson. Both researchers were sent e-mail messages on May 29, 2002 requesting their assistance in reviewing draft questions. Both eagerly agreed to participate via e-mail messages received on May 30, 2002. Draft questions were e-mailed to both researchers on October 8, 2002, with feedback received via e-mail and a telephone conversation with Dr. Benoit on October 10, 2002. Draft questions were finalized with special consideration given to the input from Drs. Benoit and Brinson. A review of the interview questions by these two subject area experts adds to the reliability and quality of study results.

The reliability of questions was tested through a pilot interview session with four campus administrators not selected to participate in the study. Draft questions were finalized with special consideration given to the feedback received in the pilot interview session.

Questions for the in-depth interviews with Seton Hall University administrators are:

1. What do you believe were the elements of the Seton Hall University crisis plan at the time of the fire?

2. What do you believe was the goal of Seton Hall University's crisis communication plan at the time of the fire?

3. Did the plan include a communication philosophy, a suggested approach for how the university would communicate during a crisis (ie: a statement of openness, honestly, etc.)?

4. Did the plan include a commitment to a particular type of communication

discourse, a suggested approach for communication (ie: corrective action, a focus on apology, etc.)?

5. How do you believe each of the following statements influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis? Describe the nature of this influence as positive, negative, neutral, or other. (a) "The university is setting up a toll free phone number for parents and students." (b) "Our focus today [the day of the fire] as a university community is to tend to the needs of our students and their families – that is the focus for today." (c) "We are a special, strong community." (d) "The smoke alarm and pull stations were tested yesterday (Tuesday, January 19, 2000) by an external inspection company as part of a routine inspection performed every other month. The building's alarm system is in total working order and is electronically checked daily. The alarms are responded to by Seton Hall University's Department of Public Safety. Fire extinguishers are also checked every other month. The fire extinguishers were last inspected on November 23, 1999 with no problems noted." (e) "We can not respond to that particular issue [of why the fire occurred]…it is part of an on-going investigation." (f) "No false alarms are considered false at Seton Hall. Each prompt the appropriate response." (g) "The disconnected hoses in Boland Hall were antiquated…nothing that would be used by firefighters today." (h) "More than 65% of all dormitories in the state are not equipped with sprinklers." (i) "You don't go through something like this without introspection, whether individually or as a group…sprinkler systems are just one aspect of an overall fire plan. Fire walls, smoke detectors and security officers are also important. We will consider anything and everything to make sure that something like this never, ever happens again." (j) "Seton Hall's fire safety systems in Boland Hall performed properly in the January 19 fire. All

six of Seton Hall's residence halls have smoke detectors in every room, common areas, and hallways; as well as fire doors and pull stations. Two of Seton Hall's residence halls – Boland, where the fire occurred, and Aquinas – will now be equipped with sprinkler systems. All other residence halls will be expanded. Building codes have served as a baseline for sprinkler systems. The University will now be exceeding those standards." (k) "Seton Hall's commitment has not changed since January 19. These students and their families who have been affected by the fire continue to be our first priority. Today, I want to make a simple, but important distinction. These grieving families and their attorneys are not one in the same. I am not naïve about the law and tactics used in the pursuit of justice. However, when attorneys questions our compassion, and the care and support of this community, I take umbrage."

6. In your opinion, why did the University communicate the fact that Seton Hall was not legally required to equip its dormitories with sprinklers?

7. In your opinion, why didn't the University shift the blame for the fire to students/visitors who may have set it?

8. In your opinion, why didn't the University deny responsibility for the crisis?

9. In your opinion, does citing a national trend for a campus crisis (ie: that false alarms are a problem at campuses throughout the nation, not just at Seton Hall) build compassion for a campus undergoing a crisis connected to that trend?

10. In your opinion, why did the University note that nearly 67% of the nation's campuses with residence halls were not fully equipped with sprinkler systems at the time of the Seton Hall crisis?

11. How do you believe each of the following actions influenced Seton Hall's image

during and post crisis? Describe the nature of this influence (positive, negative, neutral, other). (a) Setting up an 800 number for information, (b) Setting up the University Center as a student-only location during and after the fire, (c) Immediately making counseling available and urging use of counsels, (d) Arranging an evening prayer service on the night of the fire, (e) Holding a memorial service, (f) Partnering with Lipman Hearne, a public relations firm, for support during and after the crisis, (g) Erecting a memorial bell tower, (h) Establishing a scholarship fund, (i) Installing sprinklers in all dormitory buildings, (j) Developing a memorial garden outside Boland Hall.

12. In your opinion, what vehicle of communication (ie: University web site, University phone calls, reports from friends and family, media reports) most positively influenced Seton Hall's image during and after the crisis?

13. In your opinion, what vehicle of communication (ie: University web site, University phone calls, reports from friends and family, media reports) most negatively influenced Seton Hall's image during and after the crisis?

14. How would you characterize media reports during Seton Hall's response to the fire? Describe media reports (positive, negative, neutral, other).

15. To your knowledge, did the Seton Hall crisis plan include a commitment to taking corrective action post crisis?

16. In your opinion, how should a university honor/remember those affected by crisis on campus?

17. What effect do the Seton Hall memorials to fire victims have on your view of the university post-crisis? Describe you view (positive, negative, neutral, other).

18. Do you perceive long-term remembrances of the fire as necessary for Seton Hall?

Why?

19. What was your perception of Seton Hall University's image pre-crisis? Describe this perception (positive, negative, neutral, other).

20. What is your perception of Seton Hall University image post-crisis? Describe this perception (positive, negative, neutral, other).

Lastly, three focus group interviews were conducted with Seton Hall University alumni who completed their undergraduate degree at the University between May1995 and May 2000, and who lived in New Jersey in 2000. Seton Hall alumni have a clear interest and stake in the image and reputation of the University. Young alumni who are searching for employment, seeking promotions, or looking for new opportunities are particularly invested in the image of their University. Those who lived in New Jersey in 2000 are most likely to have been exposed to media reports and other external communication about the Seton Hall University crisis and are likely to have sought news and information about the crisis using Web technology.

The focus group interview participants were selected in the following manner: (a) Alumni listed in the 2000 Seton Hall University Alumni Directory who completed an undergraduate degree at the University between May 1995 and May 2000 and who lived in New Jersey in 2000 were identified. (b) Alumni identified were mailed letters (see Appendix B) by the researcher to explain the goal of the study, and describe the voluntary and confidential nature of each individual's involvement in the study. A reply card was enclosed in the letter that asked the individual to self-select for inclusion in the focus group or to decline involvement. Those who self-selected inclusion in the focus group interview were asked to provide an e-mail address and phone number. (c) A random

sample was draw from those alumni who self-selected inclusion in the focus group interview. Those randomly selected were contacted via e-mail regarding the specific date, time, and place of the focus group interview. Additional participants were randomly selected if focus group interview dates and times are inconvenient to particular individuals. All those who respond to the initial letter were e-mailed thank you letters regardless of their decision to participate or not.

Questions for the focus group interviews were created based on the study's research questions and subsidiary questions and centered on the University's use of various elements of Image Restoration Discourse Theory. All focus group questions were reviewed by two of the leading experts on image repair discourse, Dr. William Benoit and Dr. Susan Brinson. Both researchers were sent e-mail messages on May 29, 2002 requesting their assistance in reviewing draft questions. Both eagerly agreed to participate via e-mail messages received on May 30, 2002. Draft questions were e-mailed to both researchers on October 8, 2002, with feedback received via e-mail and a telephone conversation with Dr. Benoit on October 10, 2002. Draft questions were finalized with special consideration given to the input from Drs. Benoit and Brinson. A review of the focus group questions by these two subject area experts adds to the reliability and quality of study results.

The reliability of questions was tested through a pilot focus group session with three young alumni not selected to participate in the study. Draft questions were finalized with special consideration given to the feedback received in the pilot focus group session.

The three focus groups took place in a conference room in Seton Hall's business school building. Each took place on a separate date/time. Questions for participants of the three focus groups were:

1.  How do you believe each of the following statements influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis? Describe the nature of this influence as positive, negative, neutral, or other. (a) "The university is setting up a toll free phone number for parents and students." (b) "Our focus today [the day of the fire] as a university community is to tend to the needs of our students and their families – that is the focus for today." (c) "We are a special, strong community." (d) "The smoke alarm and pull stations were tested yesterday (Tuesday, January 19, 2000) by an external inspection company as part of a routine inspection performed every other month. The building's alarm system is in total working order and is electronically checked daily. The alarms are responded to by Seton Hall University's Department of Public Safety. Fire extinguishers are also checked every other month. The fire extinguishers were last inspected on November 23, 1999 with no problems noted." (e) "We can not respond to that particular issue [of why the fire occurred]…it is part of an on-going investigation." (f) "No false alarms are considered false at Seton Hall. Each prompt the appropriate response." (g) "The disconnected hoses in Boland Hall were antiquated…nothing that would be sued by firefighters today." (h) "More than 65% of all dormitories in the state are not equipped with sprinklers." (i) "You don't go through something like this without introspection, whether individually or as a group…sprinkler systems are just one aspect of an overall fire place. Fire walls, smoke detectors and security officers are also important. We will consider anything and everything to make sure that something like this never, ever happens again." (j) "Seton

Hall's fire safety systems in Boland Hall performed properly in the January 19 fire. All six of Seton Hall's residence halls have smoke detectors in every room, common areas, and hallways; as well as fire doors and pull stations. Two of Seton Hall's residence halls – Boland, where the fire occurred, and Aquinas – will now be equipped with sprinkler systems. All other residence halls will be expanded. Building codes have served as a baseline for sprinkler systems. The University will now be exceeding those standards." (j) "Seton Hall's commitment has not changed since January 19. These students and their families who have been affected by the fire continue to be our first priority. Today, I want to make a simple, but important distinction. These grieving families and their attorneys are not one in the same. I am not naïve about the law and tactics used in the pursuit of justice. However, when attorneys questions our compassion, and the care and support of this community, I take umbrage."

2. In your opinion, did the University's communication of the fact that Seton Hall was not legally required to equip its dormitories with sprinklers alleviate its responsibility for the crisis?

3. In your opinion, why didn't the University shift the blame for the fire to students/visitors who may have set it?

4. In your opinion, why didn't the University deny responsibility for the crisis?

5. In your opinion, does citing a national trend for a campus crisis (ie: that false alarms are a problem at campuses throughout the nation, not just at Seton Hall) build compassion for a campus undergoing a crisis connected to that trend?

6. In your opinion, did the University noting that nearly 67% of the nation's

campuses with residence halls were not fully equipped with sprinkler systems at the time of the Seton Hall crisis alleviate Seton Hall's responsibility for its crisis?

7. How do you believe each of the following actions influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis? Describe the nature of this influence (positive, negative, neutral, other). (a) Setting up an 800 number for information, (b) Setting up the University Center as a student-only location during and after the fire, (c) Immediately making counseling available and urging use of counsels, (d) Arranging an evening prayer service on the night of the fire (e) Holding a memorial service, (f) Partnering with Lipman Hearne, a public relations firm, for support during and after the crisis, (g) Erecting a memorial bell tower, (h) Establishing a scholarship fund, (i) Installing sprinklers in all dormitory buildings, (j) Developing a memorial garden outside of Boland Hall.

8. In your opinion, what vehicle of communication (ie: University web site, University phone calls, reports from friends and family, media reports) most positively influenced Seton Hall's image during and after the crisis?

9. In your opinion, what vehicle of communication (ie: University web site, University phone calls, reports from friends and family, media reports) most negatively influenced Seton Hall's image during and after the crisis?

10. How would you characterize media reports during Seton Hall's response to the fire? Describe reports (positive, negative, neutral, other).

11. How did the installation of sprinklers contribute to your feelings about Seton Hall post crisis? Describe the nature of your feelings (positive, negative, neutral, other).

12. In your opinion, how should a university honor/remember those affected by a crisis on campus?

13. What effect did the Seton Hall memorials of fire victims have on your view of the university post-crisis? Describe your view (positive, negative, neutral, other).

14. Do you perceive long-term remembrances of the fire as necessary for Seton Hall? Why?

15. What is your perception of Seton Hall University's image pre-crisis? Describe this perception (positive, negative, neutral, other).

16. What is your perception of Seton Hall University image post-crisis? Describe this perception (positive, negative, neutral, other).

17. What do you believe was the goal of Seton Hall University's crisis communication plan at the time of the fire?

## Limitations

The limitations of this present study begin with the body of knowledge. Although much as been written to assist campus administrators in planning a practical response to crisis, no scholarly research is found that examines and describes a university's communication discourse during and after a crisis. The Image Restoration Discourse Theory typology has been employed to critically analyze crisis communications efforts in a variety of contexts, including corporate, political, sports, and entertainment. Seton Hall University's crisis response must, therefore, be compared to the responses of organizations within these contexts rather than to other institutions of higher education.

A second limitation is the decision to examine the crisis response of a private institution. The image restoration discourse used by a private institution may differ from that for a public institution. Private colleges and universities may be able to take more expensive corrective action than public institutions. The response rate of private colleges

and universities may be quicker than that of public institutions, which may alter the course of public perception and, perhaps, the school's image restoration discourse.

The results of the in-depth interviews and focus group interviews are limited in that they rely on the participants' recollection of past events. The interviews were conducted more than 2 years after Seton Hall's fatal dorm fire. The time between the fire and the interviews may cloud results. All participants had to rely on their memory in responding to the questions put before them. Their responses may have been different if asked immediately after the fire and the University's response. In addition, participants in the focus group interviews self-selected themselves for inclusion in the study.

The study compares responses honed from administrators in interviews with those from alumni in focus groups. The different methodologies were necessary due to the serious difficulty involved with scheduling 10 executive level administrators for one group session. In addition, few administrators would have agreed to speak openly about the crisis in a focus group situation. At the same time, while the focus group method was convenient for interviewing a large group of alumni participants, some responses may have been influenced by the responses of other participants. Any obvious influence was noted and is identified in the Results section.

The questions asking subjects about their perception of Seton Hall University pre- and post crisis were asked at the end of focus group discussions and interviews. The questions' placement at the conclusion of what could be emotional recollections, may have impacted subjects' responses. Answers may not have been the same had those same questions been asked at the start of the focus group and interview discussions.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

A Case Study: A University in Crisis

In the last 5 years, researchers (Benoit, 1997; Brinson, 1999; Brinson & Benoit, 1996; Sellnow, Ulmer, & Snider, 1998) have conducted case studies using image restoration theory to carefully and comprehensively examine corporate crises that range from poisoned products to accusations of racism. The typology has been employed to critically analyze crisis communication efforts in a variety of contexts, including corporate, political, and entertainment (Brinson, 1999). Although Footlick (1997) traces a variety of campus crises in his book *Truth and Consequences*, nothing was found in the literature that specifically applies Image Restoration Discourse Theory to university or college crises. Conducting a case study focused on image restoration discourse during a university crisis moves the analysis from public relations tactics to the meaning of communication discourse. Such an exploration can assist campus communicators in better managing a crisis. It may also help to more precisely identify differences between a campus crisis and a corporate crisis. Strategies for restoring a university's image during and after a crisis may differ in important ways from restoring product, brand or corporate image. A detailed case study of a campus in crisis using Image Restoration Discourse Theory begins the exploration into this query.

This case study uses Image Restoration Discourse Theory to examine the January 19, 2000 crisis at Seton Hall University; a dormitory fire that took the lives of three

students and injured nearly 60 others. The case study was compiled through information gathered via in-depth interviews with senior campus administrators at the time of the fire; focus group interviews with a random sample of alumni living in New Jersey at the time of the fire; and content analyses of thousands of press clippings, nearly 150 local and national broadcast segments, dozens of official University statements/speeches, Web communications, and footage of all press briefings. The content analysis was conducted on material produced by the University from the day of the event, January 19, 2000 through the end of Seton Hall's spring 2002 semester. Interviews and focus groups were conducted during the summer of 2003.

Less than one hour after an intense, early morning fire broke out in the third-floor common area of Boland Hall, a six-story freshman residence hall housing 640 students on the campus of Seton Hall University, local and national news helicopters hovered over the school, broadcasting live from the scene. Hundreds of print reporters, broadcast journalists, photographers, camera crews, and news vans followed. Although the fire was extinguished quickly, it left three male18-year-old freshmen dead, five critically injured, and more than 60 hospitalized with injuries ranging from burns to smoke inhalation. The tragedy ignited a public relations crisis unprecedented in the University's 144-year history and focused national attention on the school's crisis communications and image.

Public relations professionals have long recognized one essential truth about communication: If a vacuum develops in popular opinion, speculation will fill it. No time should be lost in providing accurate facts (Cutlip, Center & Bloom, 1995). Seton Hall is located in one of the world's most intense media markets. The information vacuum enveloping the University on the morning of January 19 began to fill immediately. At

daybreak, network "chopper" coverage of the fire scene was broadcast, and journalists and anchors speculated about the fire's origins. By 7 a.m., the fire had been attributed to everything from careless smoking and space heaters, to criminal activity and over-exuberant partying after a Seton Hall basketball game. Seton Hall worked to provide facts and a consistent message.

At 7 a.m., New Jersey's News12 television station broadcast the University's first statement from Lisa Grider, Seton Hall's Assistant Vice President of Alumni and University Relations and chief spokesperson. Grider announced that "the University was working to set up a toll-free number for parents and a phone bank for students to call home. Parents wishing to come to campus [could] come to the university's recreation center." By 8 a.m., News12 and one New York metropolitan area station were broadcasting more from Grider, including confirmation of three fatalities, a hotline for parents to call for information, and the cancellation of classes. Said Grider, "Our focus today as a university community is to tend to the needs of our students and their families – that is our focus for today" (News12). All other local and national news programs broadcast information about the fatalities, injured students, the hotline, and class cancellations without the on-camera statement from Grider. Although Seton Hall's first official statements featured no clear signs of an image restoration strategy, a central and bolstering message of "community" was evident from the beginning. Throughout the crisis, the "we are a special community" message was evident in Seton Hall's discourse.

At the University's noon press conference on January 19, Seton Hall issued its first written briefing. The document (literally) spelled out the issues discussed at the press conference. It is in this initial briefing that the University made its first attempts to restore

legitimacy using defeasibility. A subset of evading responsibility, defeasibility is used to

communicate minimal control over events or a lack of information/correct information

about potential harm (Benoit, 1999). Seton Hall used defeasibility when it explained that

Boland Hall had received recent and complete authorization from fire and safety officials

as a safe residence hall. The University's briefing described Boland Hall as:

> A six-story residence hall equipped with smoke alarms, pull stations, and
>
> fire extinguishers. The smoke alarm and pull stations were tested
>
> yesterday (Tuesday, January 19, 2000) by an external inspection company
>
> as part of a routine inspection performed every other month. The
>
> building's alarm system is in total working order and is electronically
>
> checked daily. The alarms are responded to by Seton Hall University's
>
> Department of Public Safety. Fire extinguishers are also checked every
>
> other month. The fire extinguishers were last inspected on November 23,
>
> 1999, with no problems noted. (Seton Hall University, 2000)

By 11 a.m. on January 20, the focus of broadcast reports had moved from "what"

had occurred on the campus of Seton Hall University to "how" and "why" it had occurred

– or more specifically, "who was responsible." Another information vacuum was

unfolding. New Jersey law requires the County Prosecutor's Office to lead investigations

of incidents involving deaths. Although Essex County Prosecutor Don Campolo could

provide explanations of what had happened at Boland Hall, reporters' questions about

"why" were typically answered with "this is part of the on-going investigation." When

Seton Hall officials were asked similar questions, they referred reporters back to the

prosecutor's office. In order to get their stories, therefore, reporters turned to students for

their thoughts on the possible "hows" and "whys." Three central themes emerged in all

afternoon local and national newscasts. The first was that fire hoses in Boland Hall had

recently been disconnected and were lying "useless on the floor" (News12). The second

was that Boland Hall did not feature sprinklers. The third was that residents of Boland

Hall had endured 18 false alarms since the start of the school year. The number of false

alarms, frigid temperatures and the early morning hour of the January 19 alarms made

many students slow to evacuate Boland Hall.  At the noon press conference on January

19, reporters' questions centered around these three issues. Essex County Prosecutor

Campolo responded to each. The disconnected cloth hoses were recently detached to be

readied for the trash. The old hoses were antiquated and would not have been used by

firefighters. The residence hall was built in 1952, with all construction predating a 1984

state requirement for installation of sprinkler systems. Although four Seton Hall

dormitories built in the 1980s did have sprinkler systems, two did not (Boland being one

of them). Finally, Boland Hall residents had indeed had 18 false alarms since September.

As the prosecutor responded to questions about the investigation, Seton Hall

(through spokesperson Grider) continued to use defeasibility as well as elements of good

intentions as restoration strategies during press conferences, focusing on the University's

compliance with existing fire regulations. No sprinklers were in the building because they

were not required. All pull stations, fire alarms, and extinguishers were in working order.

University officials said that evacuations caused by frequent alarms at Boland Hall

trained students for evacuations. Adding to the number of alarms (more than 2 per week)

with staged evacuations would not, the University claimed, have been helpful. The

University stated that "no alarms are considered false at Seton Hall – each prompts the

appropriate response." The University also continued to focus its comments on "community," with statements about what was being done for its "community," including counseling, information hotlines, immediate loans, temporary bedding, an evening prayer vigil, and later, the planning of a memorial service. During the last press conference of the day, Grider discussed some of the heroic acts of Boland Hall students, emotionally describing how one student re-entered the building four times to bring other residents to safety. "That is the kind of community we are," she said. The University's discourse at this time took the form of bolstering. A subcategory of reducing offensiveness, bolstering uses positive comments in the hope of strengthening the public's opinion about an organization.

After being centrally featured during the first 48 hours of the Seton Hall crisis, the disconnected hoses in Boland Hall became a non-issue with the press. In his statements, Essex County Prosecutor Campolo dismissed the hoses as "old and … nothing that would have been used by firefighters today." Grider called the hoses "obsolete." Another hot issue that cooled after the initial 48 hours was the danger of false alarms and the prevalence of "boy who cried wolf" scenarios at Seton Hall and across college campuses nationwide. Although colleges and universities often initiate the "citing a national trend" strategy during a crisis, Seton Hall did not publicly note the growing trend of false alarms on college campuses. Doing so, according to Image Restoration Discourse Theory may have reduced the offensiveness of the crisis by presenting a similar issue of potentially more severe harm. In fact, this image restoration strategy was not necessary on Seton Hall's part. Reporters, however, themselves both recognized and isolated "pranks" as a

local and national problem. An *Associated Press* story ran in dozens of papers on January 20 that focused on concerns about false alarms:

> As the fire alarm blared throughout the dark dormitory, most students chalked it up as another false alarm, turned over and went back to sleep. "I thought it was a joke," said Pete Tornatore, 18. Instead, Seton Hall University freshmen in Boland Hall awoke Wednesday to a smoky fire.

Accompanying this *Associated Press* story was a report from an *Associated Press* national writer with commentary from experts that indifference to alarms is common both on campus and off.

> People ignore fire alarms "because they don't think they're real," said George Burke, spokesman for the Washington-based International Association of Fire Fighters. "That's why false alarms are so dangerous," Burke said. "It puts the people who ignore the alarms in jeopardy, and the lives of fire fighters in jeopardy."

What did remain an intensely covered topic was the lack of a sprinkler system in Boland Hall. Although Seton Hall continued to note its full compliance with existing fire regulations and its recent fire safety inspections (defeasibility), headlines and reports were largely critical of the University for not having sprinklers. An *Associated Press* piece on sprinklers and alarms ran on January 20 in dozens of newspapers across the nation. The same theme was highlighted in New Jersey's daily newspapers. The focus on Seton Hall's lack of sprinklers prompted the University to commission a report from Lipman Hearne, an independent public relations firm with whom the University had an 18-month relationship, to determine what dormitories in New Jersey did/did not have

sprinkler systems. Results of the study, top University administrators hoped, could potentially reframe the media focus on "no sprinklers at Seton Hall" to "no sprinklers in a majority of college/university residence halls across the nation." Seton Hall asked Lipman Hearne to use existing data to determine how many college residence halls in New Jersey lacked sprinkler systems. Because no data existed, the firm conducted its own primary research of state universities, finding that more than 65 percent of all dormitories in New Jersey were not equipped with sprinklers. The results were released to the media. The *Star-Ledger* subsequently conducted its own study with similar findings.

Seton Hall's release of the report, in terms of Image Restoration Discourse Theory, can be seen as differentiation – or presentation of similar issues that feature more severe harm in order to reduce offensiveness. Seton Hall presented the facts about sprinklers as proof of its compliance with accepted procedures (defeasibility) and of the bigger issue (and more severe harm) of dorm safety across the state to shift media focus off the university. When New Jersey's state newspaper, *The Star-Ledger*, published its story on the report, however, its focus was on image repair itself rather than on any "bigger picture" message. An *Associated Press* story based on *The Star-Ledger's* coverage ran in dozens of papers across the nation with the headline: School's image a concern after fire. The article started:

> Seton Hall officials wasted no time trying to repair the school's image
> after a dormitory fire last week killed three students and injured dozens
> more. The school's public relations team held strategy meetings to plan
> how to rebuild the Catholic university's reputation within hours of the

deadly fire, according to a published report. At least one public relations

firm was contacted within 24 hours of the fire to prepare a plan to deflect

charges that the university had been negligent in taking insufficient fire

safety measures, the report said. (January 24, 2000)

The media's critical analysis of Seton Hall's public relations strategies in the midst of the

Boland Hall crisis supports Footlick's (1997) contention that news coverage of colleges

and universities has become more argumentative, investigative, and aggressive. Seton

Hall's request that its public relations firm conduct research and report on the overall

status of sprinkler systems in New Jersey colleges is, in practical terms, sound public

relations. The findings help reframe the issue, turning the media focus to the bigger

picture. The media's scrutiny of the university's image restoration strategy and its

negative portrayal of a college's concern about image are intriguing and deserves further

investigation.

After a Seton Hall's use of differentiation did not have its intended impact in

the press, local, state and national legislators got the message that most college and

university dormitory rooms lacked sprinklers. Within days of the fire, New Jersey

Governor Christine Todd Whitman said she would consider legislation requiring

sprinklers in all college dormitories. Legislators in New Jersey, New York and several

other states reviewed sprinkler requirements and discussed amendments. Jacobs (2000)

reported that by February 1 in New York state alone, 10 lawmakers had introduced 10

fire safety bills.

At Seton Hall, the image restoration strategy of defeasibility and differentiation

began to give way to hints of corrective action. Said Grider,

The university... is considering many, many things. You don't go through

something like this without introspection, whether individually or as a

group...sprinkler systems are just one aspect of an overall fire plan. Fire walls,

smoke detectors and security officers are also important. We will consider

anything and everything to make sure that something like this never, ever happens

again. (ABCnews.com)

In fact, on February 2, 2 weeks after the tragic fire, Seton Hall called a press

conference to announce that sprinklers would be installed in Boland Hall and Aquinas

Hall and upgraded in all other dorms on campus – immediately and even though it was

not required by law. The University's press release read:

Seton Hall's fire safety systems in Boland Hall performed properly in the January

19 fire. All six of Seton Hall's residence halls have smoke detectors in every

room, common areas, and hallways; as well as fire doors and pull stations.

According to Monsignor Robert Sheeran, two of Seton Hall's residence halls –

Boland, where the fire occurred, and Aquinas – will now be equipped with

sprinkler systems. All other residence halls will be expanded. According to

Monsignor Sheeran, building codes have served as a baseline for sprinkler

systems and the University will now be exceeding those standards. (Seton Hall

University, 2000)

As the University announced corrective action, it continued to include signs of

defeasibility and differentiation in its image restoration discourse. The corrective action,

however, dominated headlines and leading broadcast stories. It also eased the critical tone

of media coverage. Although the "hows" of the tragic fire were still under investigation,

the university was moving forward in its efforts to prevent a recurrence. The corrective action strategy gained momentum when the University changed its fire drill policy by scheduling surprise drills.

The positive impact of Seton Hall's corrective action is perhaps most evident in the media's March 1 2000 coverage of a New Jersey Fire Safety Report on the University. Although more than 800 violations (among all of the school's 35 buildings) were cited, the coverage was more balanced than any previous coverage of fire-related events/communications. News12 interviewed one fire inspector who said the findings did not indicate negligence and were the kinds of things "you'd find anywhere if you looked close enough – like broken light bulbs and trash near stairways." Grider was included in several newscasts saying that the "violations were regular maintenance issues not inconsistent with what you'd find in any dormitory. In fact, Seton Hall has corrected more than half of the violations" featured in the report. After the university took corrective action, the media provided more balanced attention to Seton Hall's communications. This trend toward more balanced coverage continued through two potentially very damaging fire-related stories in March and April. In March, a small fire that started in a dryer in Seton Hall's Recreation Center received attention from state print media, and state and network broadcast media. While most every report mentioned "memories of January 19," coverage was free from the negative speculation and finger-pointing experienced during the Boland fire. In April 2000, when the lawyers for the families of two deceased students and three injured students held a press conference to announce intent to sue the University, coverage remained balanced, with all media outlets

prominently featuring one particularly strong portion of a statement from the University's president. Said Monsignor Sheeran:

> Seton Hall's commitment has not changed since January 19. These students and their families who have been affected by the fire continue to be our first priority. Today, I want to make a simple, but important distinction. These grieving families and their attorneys are not one in the same. I am not naïve about the law and tactics used in the pursuit of justice. However, when attorneys questions our compassion, and the care and support of this community, I take umbrage. (Seton Hall, 2000)

With corrective action already taken, this bolstering statement served to reduce the offensiveness of the crisis (Benoit, 1997).

<p align="center">Interviews and Focus Groups</p>

The purpose of this section is to present the results of subjects' responses to the interview and focus group questions and associated statistical analyses. A total of 45 subjects participated in interviews for this study, with 38 alumni and 7 administrators. The alumni responses were captured in three separate focus groups with 14, 15, and 9 participants. The administrator responses were captured in individual interviews. Responses were coded and tallied for each question. The statistical analysis of results is organized around each subsidiary question.

*Image restoration discourse and the Seton Hall plan.* In what ways did Seton Hall's crisis communication plan at the time of the fire incorporate image restoration discourse? Administrators were asked three questions on the topic of the crisis communication plan that may have been in place at the time of the fire. Students were not

asked these three questions. Students do not have knowledge of administrative plans.

Administrator questions and responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*The Seton Hall Crisis Communication Plan &*
*Image Restoration Discourse - Administrators*

| Question | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| "What do you believe were the elements of the Seton Hall crisis plan at the time of the fire?" | | |
| Logistics | 3 | 42.9 |
| Basic Communication | 2 | 28.6 |
| Do not know | 2 | 28.6 |
| | | |
| Did the plan include a communication philosophy, a suggested approach for how the University would communicate during the crisis? | | |
| Be honest | 1 | 14.3 |
| Catholic mission | 2 | 28.6 |
| Do not know | 4 | 57.1 |
| | | |
| Did the plan include a commitment to a specific type of communication discourse, a suggested approach for communication? | | |
| Corrective action | 2 | 28.6 |
| Provide information | 1 | 14.3 |
| Do not know | 4 | 57.1 |

The above responses indicate that Seton Hall University administrators held

different views about the elements of any crisis communications plan, communication

philosophy, and communications approach that may/may not have existed at the time of

the fire. In the first question, more administrators (42.9%) responded that logistics were

the central elements of the crisis communication plan. Subjects defined logistics as a

focus on non-communication activities, including responses such as security, relocation

of students, and evacuation. One administrator explained that "there were numerous

(logistical) plans. An evacuation plan for fire, what to do when there is a fire...and a

student affairs plan, a security plan." Another noted that "while the University itself had a

crisis plan that focused on student affairs...it did not focus on disaster. It was not a

disaster plan...it included crises like racial incidents and sexual assault, which, frankly,

on a campus today, are part of life." The number of administrators (n=3) who provided

the logistics response, however, varied little from the number of administrators (n=2)

who responded that basic communication procedures were central to the crisis plan

(responses such as phone chains, designated meeting places, and commitment to

communicate with the press), or those who responded that they did not know what the

elements of the Seton Hall crisis plan were at the time of the fire (n=2).

Of note in responses to the second and third questions above is the higher

percentage of administrators who responded "do not know" to each question. More than

half (57.1%) of the administrators did not know if the crisis communication plan included

a communication philosophy, a suggested approach for how the University would

communicate during a crisis; and more than half did not know if the plan included a

commitment to a specific type of communication discourse, a suggested approach for

communication.

A question regarding the goal of the University's crisis communication plan was

asked of all subjects and the responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*The Goal of the Crisis Communication Plan*

| Question | Human Element | | Protect Org. Image | | No Plan | | Don't know | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | n | % | n | % |
| Goal | | | | | | | | |
| "What do you believe was the goal of Seton Hall University's crisis | | | | | | | | |

| communication plan at the time of the fire?" | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FG1 | 14 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| FG2 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 13.3 | 13 | 86.7 |
| FG3 | 5 | 55.6 | 4 | 44.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| All FGS | 19 | 50.0 | 4 | 10.5 | 2 | 5.3 | 13 | 34.2 |
| Administrators | 5 | 71.4 | 1 | 14.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 14.3 |
| All subjects | 24 | 53.3 | 5 | 11.1 | 2 | 4.4 | 14 | 31.1 |

As shown in Table 2, 50% of the alumni and most of the administrators (71.4%) felt that the goal of Seton Hall's crisis communication plan was to focus on the human element. The human element was described by respondents as a compassionate focus on students and their families. It included responses such as "to show concern for students," "to focus on Seton Hall's Catholic mission," and "to communicate care for students." In interviews, administrators made similar statements, such as: "It seemed to me that the welfare of the students and their families was a top priority." "The goal was to communicate honestly what was happening, to really focus on human elements. We tried really hard to say that this is really about the people who had been injured and people who had died. And we are really here to communicate our compassion and our concern for them." And, "the goal off the bat was that we are a community that has been shaken by this tragedy and our primary goal is to make sure that our students get what they need. As a community, we have to deal with it together." Half of the alumni subjects also responded that the goal was a focus on the human element. However, responses among the three alumni focus groups varied greatly, with each focus group reaching a different consensus. All subjects (100%) in focus group 1 responded that the goal was a focus on the human element. In focus group 2, most (86.7%) participants responded that they did not know what the goal of the communication plan was at the time of the fire. Focus

group 3 was nearly split between those who felt the human element was the focus (55.6%) of the plan and those who believed the University's goal was to protect its organizational image (44.4%).

Overall, few subjects stated that the goal of the crisis communication plan was to protect the organization's image (10.5% alumni and 14.3% administrators). Only 2 subjects (4.4%) overall indicated that there was no plan, and 14 subjects (31.1% and 13 in focus group 3) indicated that they did not know.

*Perception of image restoration discourse used by Seton Hall.* Were certain elements of image restoration discourse viewed as positive, negative, or neutral in Seton Hall's response during and after the crisis? To analyze this subsidiary question, examples of Seton Hall's use of elements of image restoration discourse were honed from the content analysis of newspaper stories and broadcast reports used to develop the previous case study analysis. Respondents were asked how they believed certain statements influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis, and to describe the nature of the influence as positive, negative, neutral, or other. Table 3 through Table 7 present alumni and administrator responses organized by types of image restoration discourse, including logistics, bolstering, defeasibility, non-response, and differentiation. The alumni and administrators responses are presented below. The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine if a significant difference exists in the responses of the alumni, by group, and the administrators in their responses to each statement. The Kruskal-Wallis is a non-parametric test used to determine if multiple samples are from the same or different populations. The test answers the question of whether "the differences among samples signify significant population differences or whether they represent merely the kind of

variations that are to be expected among random samples from the same population"

(Siegal & Castellan, 1988, p. 206).

Table 3

*Elements of Image Restoration Discourse/ Logistics*

| Question | Pos. | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| LOGISTICS | | | | | | | | | |
| "The university is setting up a toll free phone number for parents and students." | | | | | | | 2.25 | 3 | .52 |
| FG1 | 13 | 92.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 7.1 | | | |
| FG2 | 11 | 73.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 26.7 | | | |
| FG3 | 8 | 88.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 11.2 | | | |
| All FGS | 32 | 84.2 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 15.8 | | | |
| Administrators | 6 | 85.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 14.3 | | | |

Table 3 presents subjects' responses to a question regarding basic communication

to engage respondents and ready them to respond to statements relating specifically to the

University's use of image restoration discourse. Both the alumni and administrators

viewed setting up a toll free number positively. No subjects viewed this statement as

negative. There were no significant differences among the groups' responses to this

question. The one administrator who responded neutral to the statement noted that the

telephone line was "a necessity, something that would be expected in any crisis." Some

alumni also bordered on the neutral, with statements similar to one subject's that, "maybe

Seton Hall should already have had a toll free number for these sorts of crises. But, it's a

good thing they set one up."

Table 4

*Elements of Image Restoration Discourse/Bolstering*

| Question | Pos. | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| BOLSTERING | | | | | | | | | |
| "Our focus today [the day of the fire] as a university community is to tend to the needs of our students and their families – that is the focus for today." | | | | | | | 5.35 | 3 | .14 |
| FG1 | 13 | 92.9 | 0 | | 1 | 7.1 | | | |
| FG2 | 10 | 66.7 | 2 | 13.3 | 3 | 20.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 5 | 55.6 | 1 | 11.1 | 3 | 33.3 | | | |
| All FGS | 28 | 73.7 | 3 | 7.9 | 7 | 18.4 | | | |
| Administrators | 6 | 85.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 14.3 | | | |
| "We are a special, strong community." | | | | | | | 2.67 | 3 | .44 |
| FG1 | 4 | 28.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 10 | 71.4 | | | |
| FG2 | 8 | 53.3 | 2 | 13.3 | 5 | 33.3 | | | |
| FG3 | 4 | 44.4 | 2 | 22.2 | 3 | 33.3 | | | |
| All FGS | 16 | 42.1 | 4 | 10.5 | 18 | 47.4 | | | |
| Administrators | 5 | 71.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 28.6 | | | |
| "Seton Hall's commitment has not changed......I take umbrage." | | | | | | | 5.63 | 3 | .13 |
| FG1 | 5 | 35.7 | 2 | 14.3 | 7 | 50.0 | | | |
| FG2 | 8 | 53.3 | 4 | 26.7 | 3 | 20.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 8 | 88.9 | 1 | 11.1 | 0 | 0.0 | | | |
| All FGS | 21 | 55.3 | 7 | 18.4 | 10 | 26.3 | | | |
| Administrators | 5 | 71.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 28.6 | | | |

Table 4 presents the subjects' responses to bolstering statements. The first statement, which notes that the focus of the university community "is to tend to the needs of our students and their families" was viewed by the alumni and administrators as the most positive of all bolstering statements. Interestingly, the last two (and stronger moral, yet more general Seton Hall focused) statements were viewed more positively by

administrators than alumni. More than 70% of administrators positively viewed

bolstering statements noting that the University is a "special strong community" (71.4%)

and that its "commitment has not changed" (71.4%). While the statement was considered

positive by most administrators, it did not have the same effect on alumni. Across all

focus groups, 47.4% had a neutral reaction to the "special strong community" statement,

and 26.3% were neural to the "commitment has not changed" statement. Across alumni

groups, 18.4 % viewed the University's "commitment has not changed" statement as

negative.

Significant differences were found regarding three of the four statements that

reflect the use of defeasibility as part of the University's image restoration discourse.

Reponses are analyzed in Table 5.

Table 5

*Elements of Image Restoration Discourse/Defeasibility*

| Question | Pos. | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| **DEFEASIBILITY** | | | | | | | | | |
| "The smoke alarms and pull stations…with no problems noted." | | | | | | | 9.77 | 3 | .02 |
| FG1 | 8 | 57.1 | 1 | 7.1 | 5 | 35.7 | | | |
| FG2 | 8 | 53.3 | 1 | 6.7 | 6 | 40.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 33.3 | 6 | 66.7 | | | |
| All FGS | 16 | 42.1 | 5 | 13.2 | 17 | 44.7 | | | |
| Administrators | 4 | 57.1 | 1 | 14.3 | 2 | 28.6 | | | |
| "No false alarms are considered false at Seton Hall. Each prompt the appropriate response. | | | | | | | 21.20 | 3 | .001 |
| FG1 | 10 | 71.4 | 1 | 7.1 | 3 | 21.4 | | | |
| FG2 | 11 | 73.3 | 1 | 6.7 | 3 | 20.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 0 | 0.0 | 8 | 88.9 | 1 | 11.1 | | | |
| All FGS | 21 | 55.3 | 10 | 26.3 | 7 | 18.4 | | | |
| Administrators | 3 | 42.9 | 1 | 14.3 | 3 | 42.9 | | | |
| "The disconnected hoses in Boland Hall were antiquated…nothing that would be used by firefighters today." | | | | | | | 8.09 | 3 | .04 |
| FG1 | 0 | 0.0 | 11 | 78.6 | 4 | 21.4 | | | |
| FG2 | 1 | 6.7 | 11 | 73.3 | 3 | 20.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 0 | 0.0 | 8 | 88.9 | 1 | 11.1 | | | |
| All FGS | 1 | 2.6 | 30 | 78.9 | 7 | 18.4 | | | |
| Administrators | 1 | 14.3 | 2 | 28.6 | 4 | 57.1 | | | |
| In your opinion, did the university's communication of the fact that Seton Hall was not legally required to equip its dormitories with sprinklers alleviate its responsibility for the crisis? | Did allevi- ate | | Did not allevi- ate | | Some- what | | 1.31 | 2 | .51 |
| FG1 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 42.9 | 8 | 57.1 | | | |
| FG2 | 0 | 0.0 | 7 | 46.7 | 8 | 53.3 | | | |
| FG3 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 66.7 | 3 | 33.3 | | | |
| All FGS | 0 | 0.0 | 19 | 50.0 | 19 | 50.0 | | | |

| Administrators | na | Na | Na |
|---|---|---|---|

Regarding the University's statement about smoke alarms and pull stations, focus group 3 was significantly less positive (0%) and more negative (33.3%) and neutral (66.7%) than other alumni and administrators. More than half of the subjects in the other two focus groups viewed this statement as positive (57.1% and 53.3%). Likewise, 57.1% of administrators felt positively about this statement. Noted one administrator, "The public might have thought that there could have been negligence on our part, which could, perhaps only made them feel that this was all the more tragic...in that it might have been prevented. Whereas, letting the public know that we were up to code allayed any fear that this could have been prevented with more diligence. If I imagine myself as a member of the public upon hearing this, it would have been information that, I think, could have made a positive impression of the University." For the question regarding false alarms not being considered false, focus group 3 was again significantly more negative (88.9%) than the other alumni focus groups (7.1% and 6.7%, respectively) and administrators (14.3%). For the question regarding disconnected hoses, the alumni in total were significantly more negative (78.9%) than administrators, who were largely neutral (57.1%) about the statement. In interviews, administrators continually noted that the statement was made to build context; however, responses here seem to show that it made alumni uneasy. Administrator responses included comments such as: "Just the image of disconnected hoses needs to be explained. Even the two words – disconnected hoses – immediately gives one pause about what was going on. So, therefore, to explain what those disconnected hoses were would certainly have a positive effect on the image

of Seton Hall." Another administrator noted that "There are people who thought that they [the hoses] were useful. You need context." One administrator commented that responding to the statement without knowing when it was used was itself problematic. "It [this statement] can be neutral to negative, depending on context [in which it was asked]. It might be a response to a question. But, out of context, it can appear more negative."

Regarding a University non-response statement, focus group 3 again had significantly different responses than the other alumni focus groups and administrators. Results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

*Elements of Image Restoration Discourse/Non-response*

| Question | Pos. | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| NON-RESPONSE | | | | | | | | | |
| "We cannot respond to that particular issue, it is part of an on-going investigation" | | | | | | | 14.66 | 3 | .002 |
| FG1 | 2 | 14.3 | 2 | 14.3 | 10 | 71.4 | | | |
| FG2 | 2 | 13.3 | 4 | 26.6 | 9 | 60.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 7 | 77.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 22.2 | | | |
| All FGS | 11 | 28.9 | 6 | 15.8 | 21 | 55.3 | | | |
| Administrators | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 28.6 | 5 | 71.4 | | | |

Focus group 3 viewed the non-response statement as significantly more positive (77.8%) than the other alumni (14.2% and 13.3%) and administrators (0%). When considering responses of all alumni, most (55.3%) were neutral toward the statement, as were the majority of administrators (71.4%). In short, while non-response was not viewed as harmful to the University's image, it did not help that image either.

Statements used by the University to differentiate Seton Hall's crisis, or to cite examples/scenarios that feature potentially more severe harm are analyzed in Table 7.

Table 7

*Elements of Image Restoration Discourse/Differentiation*

| Question | Pos. | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| DIFFERENTIA-TION | | | | | | | | | |
| "More than 65% of all dormitories in the state are not equipped with sprinklers." | | | | | | | 27.38 | 3 | .001 |
| FG1 | 0 | 0.0 | 12 | 85.7 | 2 | 14.3 | | | |
| FG2 | 0 | 0.0 | 12 | 80.0 | 3 | 20.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 7 | 77.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 22.2 | | | |
| All FGS | 7 | 18.4 | 24 | 63.2 | 7 | 18.4 | | | |
| Administrators | 2 | 28.6 | 2 | 28.6 | 3 | 42.9 | | | |
| In your opinion, does citing a national trend..... connected to that trend build compassion? | Builds CP | | Does Not Build CP | | Some-what Builds CP | | 3.03 | 3 | .38 |
| FG1 | 1 | 7.1 | 5 | 35.7 | 8 | 57.1 | | | |
| FG2 | 1 | 6.7 | 10 | 66.7 | 4 | 26.7 | | | |
| FG3 | 2 | 22.2 | 6 | 66.7 | 1 | 11.1 | | | |
| All FGS | 4 | 10.5 | 21 | 55.3 | 13 | 34.2 | | | |
| Administrators | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 28.6 | 5 | 71.4 | | | |
| In your opinion, did the university noting 67%.....alleviate responsibility for the crisis? | Did alleviate | | Did not alleviate | | Somew hat | | 6.23 | 2 | .04 |
| FG1 | 0 | 0.0 | 5 | 35.7 | 9 | 64.3 | | | |
| FG2 | 0 | 0.0 | 9 | 60.0 | 6 | 40.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 0 | 0.0 | 8 | 88.9 | 1 | 11.1 | | | |
| All FGS | 0 | 0.0 | 22 | 57.9 | 16 | 42.1 | | | |
| Administrators | na | | Na | | na | | | | |

Differences in subjects' responses to the first statement identified as an example

of differentiation were statistically significant. Focus group 3, again, presented as an

outlier, with 77.8% viewing the University's statement that "more than 65% of all dormitories in the state are not equipped with sprinklers" as positive. No other alumni responses were positive and only two administrators (28.6%) viewed this statement as positive. More meaningful differences between alumni and administrator responses are evident when considering alumni responses in total. More than 60% (63.2%) of alumni viewed the statement as negative, while only 28.6% of administrators provided a negative response. In fact, 42.9% of administrators reported that they were neutral about the statement (only 18.4% of all alumni were neutral). Administrators with a neutral response again commented on both the need to give the public the larger context/impact of the issue, as well as the need to gain context in which statement was made before expressing an opinion about the statement. One administrator, for instance, asked "how soon after the fire was this statement made? Because in terms of public perception and image...what we say in response to direct questions sometimes is different from what we would choose to say on our own accord. Forced to give statistics which are true and then reading them out of context, it could make it seem different than how the interaction was videotaped for the public. It is certainly true – and truth is always good to tell, but not positive or negative without context."

When subjects were asked specifically if "citing a national trend for a campus crisis builds compassion for a campus undergoing a crisis connected to that trend," the differences among groups were not statistically significant. It is of interest, however, to note that 71.4% of administrators stated that citing a national trend somewhat built compassion for a university in crisis, while 55.3% of all alumni felt that citing a national trend did not build compassion. Administrators who replied that the statement somewhat

built compassion qualified their answers in interviews, noting that rather than "compassion," the statement builds understanding and, again, context for the public within which to view the crisis. "There are a lot of people who have no idea what actually goes on on college campuses throughout the country and I think if you help get people to understand that fire alarms [and alcohol consumption, and other college campus issues] are part of college campuses...it is more about understanding than compassion." Other administrators commented on the need to provide the public some context in which to view the crisis: "I think for a rational person who does not understand the higher education culture, and realizes that they are out of touch with people that age and do not realize how young people on campuses act...they will read it and realize 'now I understand, if this happens 25 times a semester all over the country, no wonder this can happen.' I would not say it builds compassion, but I think it leads the reasonable person some pause." Said another: "It puts it into context. It makes people understand that this is not a problem because Seton Hall is bad. It happens because we have 2,500 people between the ages of 18 and 20 living in one place. We need to remind people." And more comment on context was noted with, "I think it helps people put the tragedy in context. If someone comes to me with a tragedy, if I can put that tragedy in a larger context, it allows the person suffering to understand it in a broader way and therefore begin the healing process....the tragedy can be compounded by the uniqueness that is perceived. I think it helps the institution and the public perceiving the institution to understand a tragedy in a larger context." Alumni responding that the statement did not build compassion also clarified their views in focus groups with comments clustered around the theme of "excuse." The comments ranged from "if other campuses jumped off a bridge,

would Seton Hall?" to "national trends tend to reflect a minimum standard" to "this kind of makes people mad...this is a problem that everyone knows and no one seems to be fixing." Several alumni noted that while the statement "helps people understand what is happening in other places, it still sounds like an excuse."

What did result in statistically significant results was a question asked only to alumni if "noting that 67% of the nation's campuses with residence halls were not equipped with sprinkler systems at the time of the Seton Hall crisis alleviated Seton Hall's responsibility for the crisis." Not a single subject responded that the statement did alleviate Seton Hall's responsibility. With the exception of focus group 1, more than 60% of the alumni (66.7% of focus group 2 and 66.7% in focus group 3) responded that the statement did not alleviate the University's responsibility. In focus group 1, more than 60% (64.3%) noted that the statement somewhat alleviated Seton Hall's responsibility. It is important to note that in focus group 1 participants may have been influenced by a statement from one subject noting that "it was good because ultimately this caused new laws to be passed in New Jersey." Responses from focus group 1 after the "new laws" comment moved toward "somewhat" from "did not alleviate." Alumni who indicated that the statement did not alleviate Seton Hall's responsibility explained their responses with comments suggesting that Seton Hall should hold itself to higher standards, such as: "Seton Hall has a rich history of going beyond the status quo in academics, leadership and technology...why not safety" and "Seton Hall presents itself as a leading national university and must hold itself to a higher standard." Others reflected again on their perceptions that the statement was an attempt to explain away the problem. Said one, "I was angered when Seton Hall tried to shift the blame." A third theme presented itself in

focus group 3 responses to this statement, 88.9% of whose participants indicated that the statement did not alleviate Seton Hall's responsibility. This theme was one of moral responsibility. Noted one subject, "Although they are not legally responsible, it does not mean that they are not morally and emotionally responsible." Another said, "Citing all the problems and facts across the nation does not alleviate or build compassion for what happened. It helps legally for Seton Hall to say that we did not need sprinklers, but it does not alleviate the responsibility."

While administrators were not asked to comment on if "noting that 67% of the nation's campuses with residence halls were not equipped with sprinkler systems at the time of the Seton Hall crisis alleviated Seton Hall's responsibility for the crisis" (as alumni were above), they were asked why the University made the decision to note that 67% of the nation's campuses with residence halls were not equipped with sprinkler systems at the time of the Seton Hall crisis.

All but one of the administrators responded to the question with a reference to building context and/or perspective. Responses included comments such, "We wanted to put the sprinkler system condition in a factual context. That would help, I think. It helped people understand – not that two wrongs make a right – but it helped them to understand that nationwide we were not much different than a majority of other institutions and, therefore, this tragedy is not unique to Seton Hall and may very well have happened other places. In some ways, it was an attempt to keep a positive image with the public from a long-term standpoint. But, from an immediate situation, it was putting it in a factual context." Another said, "when people walk around and hear that there are no sprinklers, they walk around with the idea that Seton Hall did not have sprinklers, and in reality, two

thirds of the colleges in the country did not have them. It is important to let people know the facts before they rush to judgement." And, again reflecting the context theme, was a response explaining that "there was a feeling right away that people were not aware that colleges were not...so it made it look like we were a piranha. People were not aware what the regulations were and so we tried to show them that what happened here was part of a larger problem that needed to be addressed nationally. Not to shirk responsibility, but to show we were in compliance, but that compliance in higher education is different from [for instance] the hotel industry."

Two additional questions were asked to obtain more detail on subjects' reactions to certain elements of communication discourse. The first follow-up was: "In your opinion, why didn't the University shift the blame for the fire to students/visitors who may have set it?" Each administrator noted that the fact that, "at that point in the crisis, there was no evidence supporting that" and "we really did not know, we tried really hard to let the judicial system and the police do their jobs and for us to do our own." Said another administrator, "we did not know who set it and to shift the blame to students would clearly be blaming the victim. To shift the blame to visitors causes them to question our security policy." One administrator added that blaming, "was not what a Catholic university would do." Alumni responses were fairly evenly split between those who noted Seton Hall's moral responsibility for the crisis and, therefore, its inability to shift blame, and a feeling that blaming others immediately after the fire "would look bad." For instance, responses were similar to those from subjects who noted: "you can't shift the blame to have someone else take the blame because the University is ultimately in charge" and "they did not know for sure who or what it was" ... "it looks really, really

bad when you start blaming other people for something. That was not the time, they needed to be caring for students."

The second question asked to obtain additional viewpoints on elements of communication discourse was: "In your opinion, why didn't the University deny responsibility for the crisis?" In their responses, administrators consistently noted a deep sense of moral responsibility and, therefore, a feeling that denial of responsibility was never considered. "I don't think anyone there wanted to do that [deny responsibility]. On the contrary, people who were leaders there probably felt an overly...a greater sense of responsibility than we actually had," said one. "We wanted the media and public and families and students and anyone who was paying attention to know that, as an institution with students living there, we have responsibilities. That was not anything that was ever denied. Why there was a fire and why students were killed and injured, if we tried to deny that responsibility, we would appear defensive," noted another administrator. Two others agreed that denial "would have been perceived as blame shifting, and not accepting that these kids live here and what happens here ...the issue is not negligence here, we were not negligent...but parents put these kids in our care so they see us as ultimately responsible, no matter what the cause of the fire." "Even if we were as diligent as we were required by law to be, as diligent as our own ethical compass would direct, it still happened while we were caring for these boys and for those who were hurt and for those who were hurt who came to our rescue." Interestingly, in two of the three focus groups, alumni equated the University's statement that "67% of universities did not have sprinklers" as a form of denial. Comments, however, were largely neutral, such as "it would have been better to note the statistics later on. It was a good strategic move to take

attention off the University, but emotionally, it was not so hot for those involved in the situation," and "it [stating the 67%] is a clever way to neither accept nor deny responsibility." Alumni also stressed the University's moral obligation to refrain from denial in statements such as "accepting some responsibility was the right thing to do" and " while the University was not legally at fault, they were morally at fault."

*Sources of information used by Seton Hall.* What source(s) of information influenced the opinions of the campus community about the Seton Hall University crisis? To determine the value of the various sources of information used to communicate during and post crisis, alumni and administrators were asked open-ended questions about the vehicles of communication that most positively influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis, and the vehicle of communication that most negatively influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis. The results regarding positive influence are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

*Vehicles of Communication, Positive*

In your opinion, what vehicles of communication most positively influenced Seton Hall's image during and after the crisis?

|                        | FG1 | FG2 | FG3 | ADMIN |
|------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Web Site               | 5   | 8   | 5   | 4     |
| Calls to Students      | 2   | 1   | 0   | 0     |
| Media "Hero" Stories   | 2   | 4   | 1   | 1     |
| Word of Mouth          | 3   | 2   | 0   | 0     |
| Alumni Magazine        | 1   | 0   | 0   | 0     |
| Letter fr. President   | 0   | 0   | 1   | 0     |
| 800 Number             | 0   | 0   | 0   | 1     |
| SHU Radio Station      | 0   | 0   | 0   | 1     |
| None                   | 1   | 0   | 0   | 0     |

The majority of responses from alumni (n=18) and administrators (n=8) noted that the Seton Hall University Web site was the most positive vehicle of communication used during and post crisis. The Web site was followed by media reports of students and emergency personnel "heros" (alumni n=7; administrators n=1). Interestingly, in two focus groups, these two top replies were followed by word of mouth (focus group 1 n=3; focus group 2 n=2). Single administrators mentioned the Seton Hall 800 number and coverage of the fire by the Seton Hall University radio station as the most positive vehicle. One alumnus mentioned the letter from the President of the University and one mentioned a report in the *Seton Hall University Magazine*.

Alumni and administrators were also asked which vehicle of communication most negatively influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis. The results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

*Vehicles of Communication, Negative*

In your opinion, what vehicle of communication most negatively influenced Seton Hall's image during and after the crisis?

|  | FG1 | FG2 | FG3 | ADMIN |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Web Site | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Calls to Students | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Media | 11 | 12 | 7 | 5 |
| Word of Mouth | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Alumni Magazine | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| None | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |

The majority of responses from alumni (n=30) and administrators (n=5) noted that media reports of the Seton Hall fire were the most negative vehicles of communication during and post crisis. Media reports were followed by word of mouth reports (alumni n=3; administrators n=1). Of interest in this analysis are participants' qualitative responses following up on initial responses, particularly from administrators. While most (n=5) administrators felt that media reports had the most negative influence on the image of the University, the majority characterized media reports as "fair and factual." Said one administrator, "It is natural tendency for the media to take this kind of tragedy and look for the facts, but, I think, color it with some sort of public interest stuff. And, knowing that is going to happen, I would say it is probably fair and rather factual." Said another, "We have to take a step back and take in the body of the coverage and try to determine whether we were treated fairly – not favorably. And I think we were treated fairly. I think people [reporters] asked the hard questions. I think we had good answers. There was nobody out to get Seton Hall. I think we got our information out there. They treated us fairly." And finally, "Because it was a tragedy, many people thought Seton Hall was in the newspapers constantly. It was a tragedy and, I think, by and large, they reported it fairly and non-sensationally." While two alumni focus groups agreed that media reports were "fair" in their follow-up discussions, the comments from focus group 2 were more harsh, pointing out, for instance, that the media was "misinformed and searching for answers" and "using the word 'alleged' all the time, speculating about deaths and other things that were worse than what they were." Said one, "nobody knew the facts, including the reporters, but they were there [in media reports] as facts."

Related to the topic of vehicles of communication is Seton Hall's partnering with a public relations firm for [communication] support during and after the fire. While hiring outside public relations counsel in times of crisis is standard public relations practice, *The Star-Ledger*, New Jersey's largest state newspaper, reported on the partnership negatively, giving the impression that Seton Hall needed help to handle the crisis/could not handle it alone. To determine the impact of the report and to gain insight into opinions regarding the hiring of outside public relations counsel during a crisis, subjects were asked how they viewed the partnership between Seton Hall and Lipman Hearne, the public relations firm. The responses are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

*Public Relations Firm as Source*

| Question | Pos. | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| SOURCE FOR INFORMATION | | | | | | | | | |
| Partnering with Lipman Hearne, a public relations firm, for support during and after the crisis . | | | | | | | 3.49 | 3 | .32 |
| FG1 | 4 | 28.6 | 4 | 28.6 | 6 | 42.8 | | | |
| FG2 | 6 | 40.0 | 2 | 13.3 | 7 | 46.7 | | | |
| FG3 | 5 | 55.6 | 1 | 11.1 | 3 | 33.3 | | | |
| All FGS | 15 | 39.5 | 7 | 18.4 | 16 | 42.1 | | | |
| Administrators | 4 | 57.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 42.9 | | | |

Alumni and administrator responses were not significantly different, but do identity a difference between groups in the perceived value of partnering with an outside public relations firm during a crisis. No administrators thought the partnership was negative. However, 18.4% of all alumni did see the move as negative. The remainder and

majority of responses from both groups of subjects were positive (alumni were 39.5% positive; administrators were 57.1% positive), or neutral (alumni were 42.1% neutral; administrators were 42.9% neutral). Several administrators commented on the public's negative perception, with comments such as "I am aware that [hiring the public relations firm] was perceived as negative by the public, but I would say positive." Said another, "I imagine that most people would consider this negative if they knew. I am not sure how many people were aware of this...I think it was positive and think it was important for the University. But I think if the public at large knew about it, they probably thought it was too glitzy a thing to do. Negative for those who did not understand. Administrators felt it was positive and we needed whatever help we could get. We had never gone through anything quite like this before."

*The influence of corrective action on perceptions*. How did corrective action influence the opinion of members of the campus community regarding Seton Hall University's image during and after the Seton Hall University fire? The responses regarding corrective action revealed no significant differences between alumni and administrators. Overall, statements about corrective action were viewed as positive across subject groups. The results pertaining to statements of corrective action are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

*Elements of Image Restoration Discourse/Statements of Corrective Action*

| Question | Pos/ | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| CORRECTIVE ACTION STATEMENTS | | | | | | | | | |
| "You don't go through…..ever happens again." | | | | | | | 4.57 | 3 | .20 |
| FG1 | 12 | 85.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 14.3 | | | |
| FG2 | 8 | 53.3 | 1 | 6.7 | 6 | 40.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 7 | 77.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 22.2 | | | |
| All FGS | 27 | 71.0 | 1 | 2.6 | 10 | 26.3 | | | |
| Administrators | 4 | 57.1 | 1 | 14.3 | 2 | 28.6 | | | |
| Seton Hall's fire safety systems in Boland Hall… exceeding those standards." | | | | | | | 1.15 | 3 | .76 |
| FG1 | 7 | 50.0 | 3 | 21.4 | 4 | 28.6 | | | |
| FG2 | 10 | 66.7 | 2 | 13.3 | 3 | 20.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 5 | 55.6 | 1 | 11.1 | 3 | 33.3 | | | |
| All FGS | 22 | 57.9 | 6 | 15.8 | 10 | 26.3 | | | |
| Administrators | 5 | 71.4 | 1 | 14.3 | 1 | 14.3 | | | |

The first statement examined was: "You don't go through something like this without introspection, whether individually or as a group…sprinkler systems are just one aspect of an overall fire plan. Fire walls, smoke detectors and security officers are also important. We will consider anything and everything to make sure that something like this never, ever happens again." More than 70% (71.0%) of alumni and 57.1% of administrators noted that they felt positive about this statement. The second question mixed good intentions with corrective action: "Seton Hall's fire safety systems in Boland Hall performed properly in the January 19 fire. All six of Seton Hall's residence halls have smoke detectors in every room, common areas, and hallways; as well as fire doors

and pull stations. Two of Seton Hall's residence halls – Boland, where the fire occurred, and Aquinas – will now be equipped with sprinkler systems. All other residence halls will be expanded. Building codes have served as a baseline for sprinkler systems. The University will now be exceeding those standards." This statement was also viewed as positive by 57.9% of alumni and 71.4% of administrators.

To measure how subjects felt about specific corrective actions, they were asked to determine how they believed particular University actions influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis. More specifically, both alumni and administrators were asked to describe the nature of this influence as positive, negative, neutral, or other. Again, subjects' responses to correction action were positive. These responses are analyzed in Table 12.

Table 12

*Elements of Image Restoration Discourse/Corrective Action*

| Question | Pos. | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| **CORRECTIVE ACTION** | | | | | | | | | |
| Setting up an 800 number for information | | | | | | | .55 | 3 | .90 |
| FG1 | 12 | 85.7 | 1 | 7.1 | 1 | 7.1 | | | |
| FG2 | 14 | 93.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 6.7 | | | |
| FG3 | 8 | 88.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 11.1 | | | |
| All FGS | 34 | 89.5 | 1 | 2.6 | 3 | 2.6 | | | |
| Administrators | 6 | 85.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 14.3 | | | |
| Setting up the University Center as a student only location during and after the fire. | | | | | | | 2.86 | 3 | .41 |
| FG1 | 9 | 64.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 5 | 35.7 | | | |
| FG2 | 11 | 73.3 | 2 | 13.3 | 2 | 13.3 | | | |
| FG3 | 7 | 77.8 | 1 | 11.1 | 1 | 11.1 | | | |
| All FGS | 27 | 71.1 | 3 | 7.9 | 8 | 21.1 | | | |
| Administrators | 7 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | | | |
| Immediately making counseling available and urging the use of counselors. | | | | | | | 3.59 | 3 | .30 |
| FG1 | 12 | 85.7 | 1 | 7.1 | 1 | 7.1 | | | |
| FG2 | 15 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 9 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | | | |
| All FGS | 36 | 94.7 | 1 | 2.6 | 1 | 2.6 | | | |
| Administrators | 6 | 85.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 14.3 | | | |
| Installing sprinklers in all dormitories | | | | | | | 4.29 | 3 | .23 |
| FG1 | 14 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | | | |
| FG2 | 12 | 80.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 20.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 8 | 88.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 11.1 | | | |
| All FGS | 34 | 89.5 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 10.5 | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Administrators | 7 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |

All actions, including setting up an 800 number, creating a student-only section of the Student Center, and making counseling available were seen as positive by at least 71.1% of both alumni and administrators. True corrective action, the installation of sprinklers in all residence halls, was view as positive by 89.5% of alumni and 100% of administrators. In fact, focus group responses were 100%, 80.0%, 89.5% positive.

Interestingly, when alumni focus groups were asked a question about corrective action restated in a more personal way, significant differences in responses were noted. Each alumnus was asked how the installation of sprinklers contributed "to your feelings about Seton Hall post crisis." The responses, presented in Table 13 below, are this time much more neutral. In fact, 83.3% of alumni provided a neutral response to this question, with focus group 1 at 92.9% neutral and focus group 2 at 93.3% neutral. Clarification of neutral responses resulted in explanations that centered on feelings that the University was "required" to take corrective action. Alumni noted, for instance, that the installation of sprinklers" was the right thing to do," "a no brainer," and "they had to do it." Focus groups 3's responses remained positive, with 57.1% noting that the installation of sprinklers had a positive impact on their own image of the University. Administrators were not asked this question.

Table 13

*Elements of Image Restoration Discourse/Corrective Action as Installation of Sprinklers*

| Question | Pos. | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| How did the installation of sprinklers contribute to your feelings about Seton Hall post crisis | | | | | | | 9.96 | 2 | .001 |
| FG1 | 1 | 7.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 13 | 92.9 | | | |
| FG2 | 1 | 6.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 14 | 93.3 | | | |
| FG3 | 4 | 57.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 42.9 | | | |
| All FGS | 6 | 16.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 30 | 83.3 | | | |
| Administrators | na | | na | | Na | | | | |

*Subsidiary Question 5: What role if any does the campus community believe that acts of remembrance/memorials contribute to image restoration after Seton Hall University's campus crisis?*

Table 14 presents subjects' responses to the University's acts of remembrance. These include the establishment of a scholarship fund, a bell tower and a memorial garden. All subjects expressed positive views about the university's acts of remembrance.

Table 14

*Elements of Image Restoration Discourse/Acts of Remembrance*

| Question | Pos. | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| Acts of Remembrance | | | | | | | | | |
| Arranging an evening prayer service on the night of the fire | | | | | | | 2.75 | 3 | .43 |
| FG1 | 10 | 71.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 28.6 | | | |
| FG2 | 11 | 73.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 26.7 | | | |
| FG3 | 6 | 66.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 33.3 | | | |
| All FGS | 27 | 71.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 11 | 28.9 | | | |
| Administrators | 7 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | | | |
| Holding a memorial service | | | | | | | 4.00 | 3 | .26 |
| FG1 | 14 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | | | |
| FG2 | 15 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | | | |
| FG3 | 8 | 88.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 11.1 | | | |
| All FGS | 37 | 97.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 2.6 | | | |
| Administrators | 7 | | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | | | |
| Establishing a scholarship fund | | | | | | | .36 | 3 | .94 |
| FG1 | 13 | 92.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 7.1 | | | |
| FG2 | 13 | 86.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 13.3 | | | |
| FG3 | 8 | 88.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 11.1 | | | |
| All FGS | 34 | 89.5 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 10.5 | | | |
| Administrators | 6 | 85.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 14.3 | | | |
| Erecting a bell tower | | | | | | | 1.78 | 3 | .61 |
| FG1 | 10 | 71.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 28.6 | | | |
| FG2 | 13 | 86.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 13.3 | | | |
| FG3 | 8 | 88.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 11.1 | | | |
| All FGS | 31 | 81.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 7 | 18.4 | | | |
| Administrators | 5 | 71.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 28.6 | | | |
| Developing a memorial garden | | | | | | | 1.14 | 3 | .76 |
| FG1 | 10 | 71.4 | 1 | 7.1 | 3 | 21.4 | | | |
| FG2 | 11 | 73.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 26.7 | | | |
| FG3 | 8 | 88.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 11.1 | | | |
| All FGS | 29 | 76.3 | 1 | 2.6 | 8 | 21.1 | | | |

| Administrators | 5 | 71.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 28.6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

The most positive response related to the establishment of a scholarship fund (89.5% of alumni and 85.7% of administrators), followed by the erection of a memorial bell tower (81.6% of alumni and 71.4% of administrators), and the development of a memorial garden (76.3% of alumni and 71.4% of administrators). When subjects were asked the "effect Seton Hall memorials of fire victims had on their view of the University post crisis," there were no significant differences in the responses of alumni and administrators. Responses are presented in Table 15.

Table 15

*Acts of Remembrance and Image*

| Question | Pos. | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| What effect did Seton Hall memorials of fire victims have on your view of the University post crisis ? | | | | | | | 1.58 | 3 | .66 |
| FG1 | 10 | 71.4 | 1 | 7.1 | 3 | 21.4 | | | |
| FG2 | 13 | 86.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 13.3 | | | |
| FG3 | 6 | 66.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 33.3 | | | |
| All FGS | 29 | 76.3 | 1 | 2.6 | 8 | 21.1 | | | |
| Administrators | 5 | 71.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 28.6 | | | |
| Do you perceive long-term remembrances of the fire as necessary for Seton Hall? | yes | | no | | Some-what | | 8.78 | 3 | .03 |
| FG1 | 5 | 35.7 | 3 | 21.4 | 6 | 42.8 | | | |
| FG2 | 6 | 40.0 | 1 | 6.7 | 8 | 53.3 | | | |
| FG3 | 3 | 33.3 | 1 | 11.1 | 5 | 55.5 | | | |
| All FGS | 14 | 36.8 | 5 | 13.2 | 19 | 50.0 | | | |
| Administrators | 7 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | | | |

Across all alumni groups, 76.3% felt the effect was positive, as did 71.4% of administrators. Just 21.1% of alumni and 28.6% of administrators expressed the effect of the memorials on their view of the University as neutral. Significant differences were found for responses to the question "do you perceive long-term remembrances of the fire as necessary for Seton Hall." While 100% of administrators noted that long-term remembrances are necessary for Seton Hall, half of all alumni said long-term remembrances were just somewhat necessary for the University. Alumni providing a "somewhat" response added statements regarding the length of these acts, with comments such as "I don't think the tragedy should be forgotten, but constant reminders may inhibit students from enrolling" and "we don't want to forget, but constantly reminding students who were here at the time is not necessary and may be harmful."

To obtain more detailed responses, all subjects were asked "how should a university honor/remember those affected by a crisis on campus?" The majority of administrators included commentary about how culture – and, specifically Seton Hall's Catholic culture – should impact a university's remembrances. Said one administrator, "It depends on the institution and it should reflect the culture of the specific institution. As a Catholic institution, we do a memorial mass and will do it forever on that anniversary...I think something like the bell tower, that is tied to the chapel, has a spiritual dimension that is very important to us." Another said, "We are a Catholic university and that would make a difference. We get to have a memorial mass every year. We get to have prayer services, unabashedly, without having to explain why we are dragging religion into it...as another institution might have to do." Others agreed, noting that, "I think that because we are a Catholic institution, we will have to memorialize and remember in ways that we

would not at a public institution," and "there were a lot of things that happened in and around the fire that would not have happened had Seton Hall been public. A public school would have never stopped classes...we are Catholic and that is who we are. We behave differently." And finally, "[remembrance] flows from the culture of an institution. As a Catholic university you will have a bell...there is something transcendent about bells and it reminds us of life after death ... and the three bells that we have, that was a particular way to memorialize it. The ways you memorialize comes from your tradition, your culture. Universities are perennial institutions, and want to do something that will remain for a very, very long time. That is why we put the word 'remember' [on the large stone in the memorial garden]." Only two alumni (in focus group 2) included reference to culture/the Catholic culture in their responses. The first response was: "If you are a Catholic university and religious, you kind of have to go a little bit more than Rutgers should have or a public school, because that is who Seton Hall is." The second was "You want people to remember. Memorial services are good for Catholic schools." Other focus group discussions about this topic focused on remembrances specific to Seton Hall. Overall, the tone of the discussions were positive, with alumni noting the value of remembering and, said several, including some remembrances/learning sessions during freshmen orientation each year.

*The pre- and post-crisis image of the University.* Table 16 presents responses to two final questions asked to administrators and alumni focus group participants. Subjects were asked to describe their perception of the University pre-crisis and post-crisis as positive, negative or neutral. Results were not significantly different between the groups.

Table 16

*Image Pre-and Post-Crisis*

| Question | Pos. | | Neg. | | Neutral | | KW Test | DF | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | | | |
| What was your perception of Seton Hall University's image pre-crisis? | | | | | | | 3.61 | 3 | .30 |
| FG1 | 7 | 50.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 7 | 50.0 | | | |
| FG2 | 10 | 71.4 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 28.6 | | | |
| FG3 | 4 | 50.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 50.0 | | | |
| All FGS | 21 | 58.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 15 | 41.6 | | | |
| Administrators | 6 | 85.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 14.3 | | | |
| What was your perception of Seton Hall University's image post crisis? | | | | | | | 5.12 | 3 | .16 |
| FG1 | 6 | 46.2 | 1 | 7.7 | 6 | 46.2 | | | |
| FG2 | 6 | 42.9 | 2 | 14.3 | 6 | 42.9 | | | |
| FG3 | 3 | 33.3 | 1 | 11.1 | 5 | 55.5 | | | |
| All FGS | 15 | 41.6 | 4 | 11.1 | 17 | 47.2 | | | |
| Administrators | 6 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | | | |

None (0%) of the subjects (alumni or administrators) held negative perceptions of Seton Hall prior to the crisis. Across all alumni focus groups, 58.3% felt positively about the University, with focus group 2 at 71.4% positive. More than 80% (85.7%) of administrators reported positive perceptions of the University as well. Just one administrator noted a neutral perception. When asked about their perception of the University after the crisis, more alumni responses were negative and neutral. Overall, 41.6% of alumni held to their positive perceptions of the University. However, 11.1% noted a negative perception and 47.2% noted a neutral perception. All administrators (100%) described their perception of the University after the fire as positive, several noting that, throughout the crisis, Seton Hall showed itself to be "who we say we are." Said one, "I think the idea that Seton Hall is a family ... there is no doubt. We have

always prided ourselves on this and I do not think there is any doubt that people saw us as a community that cared, a community that was close, a community that cried together, a community that moves itself forward. And did the right thing."

Summary

Some key conclusions regarding communication discourse are drawn from the analysis of alumni focus group and administrator interview responses. The first is that while Seton Hall likely had a crisis plan that featured logistical and safety procedures and responses (as reported by 42.9% of administrators), it is unlikely that it included a focus on communication. Specifically, 57.1% of alumni reported that they did not know if a communication philosophy was included in the plan and 57.1% noted that they did not know if the plan included a commitment to a specific type of communication discourse.

The perception of alumni and administrators regarding specific types of communication discourse used in the University's response to the fire are of interest. While Seton Hall's bolstering statements were viewed positively by both alumni and administrators, alumni were most positive about the bolstering statement that centered on students, that emphasized the focus of the response as to "tend to the needs of students and their families." Other bolstering statements noting that Seton Hall was a "special, strong community" and that "Seton Hall's commitment had not changed" were not viewed as positively by alumni participants. In short, while administrators were positive about all bolstering statements, the University's statements about students and families were seen as much more positive by alumni than its comments regarding the University itself.

Responses to statements identified as examples of the University's use of differentiation should also be noted. More than 60% (63.2%) of alumni viewed the University's statement that "more than 65% of dormitories are not equipped with sprinklers" as negative, only 28.6% of administrators provided a negative response. In fact, 42.9% of administrators reported that they were neutral about the statement (only 18.4% of all alumni were neutral). Administrators with a neutral response commented on the need to give the public the larger context/impact of the issue, as well as the need to understand the context in which the statement was made before expressing an opinion about the statement. In fact, the theme of context was evident in administrator responses to all differentiation comments. Clearly, administrators feel they needed to build context for those who did not understand life on campus, campus regulations, and more. Young alumni, of course, do not need this context. As a result, perhaps, the value placed on context by administrators was higher than the value perceived by the alumni. Alumni were most positive about a focus on them (students), but administrators had other publics (reporters, community members, parents, potential students, etc.) for whom to build context.

A pattern similar to alumni and administrator responses regarding differentiation is evident in participant reactions to defeasibility statements. Alumni were more negative toward defeasibility statements than administrators, who again, emphasized the importance of building context for those who did not understand life on campus or how campuses are regulated.

Responses to questions about vehicles of communication that most positively influenced Seton Hall's image during and after the fire underscore the value of Web sites

for providing information. That media reports were seen as the vehicle of communication that most negatively influenced Seton Hall's image was, perhaps, expected. Media reports could not be controlled by the University and were, by the very nature of the tragic events, negative. Administrator responses reflected an understanding of this, with reports largely characterized in interviews as "fair."

Both statements inferring corrective action and actual corrective action were viewed as positive by both alumni and administrators, with true corrective action (the installation of sprinklers) garnering the most positive responses overall. Equally as positive responses were noted regarding acts of remembrance, with administrators more positive than alumni that remembrances should continue in the long-term. Administrators' inclusion of Seton Hall's culture - and, specifically its Catholic culture - in their responses about remembrances underscores the importance of culture to campus life, image and crisis responses.

And finally, while alumni perceptions of the University pre-crisis were more positive than alumni responses post-crisis, administrators' positive perceptions (already at 85.7% before the fire) about the University increased after the fire.

Chapter V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the research was to identify and describe the elements of Image Restoration Discourse Theory present in Seton Hall University's response to a severe campus crisis. The research was designed to expand the theory by focusing on a previously unexplored communicator – the university – and its use of restoration discourse. In addition, the research design was developed to include suggestions made by Burns and Bruner (2000). These include exploring the theory in the context of the internet; examining responses for the inclusion and value of other discourse, such as symbols; and using more audience-centric methods, such as interviews and focus groups.

The present study succeeded in identifying and describing the elements of Image Restoration Discourse Theory present in Seton Hall University's response to its crisis. These elements are defined below.

*Denial*: Denial of a wrongful act or that the organization performed it. (a) *Shifting the Blame*: A subset of denial used to refocus attention elsewhere by suggesting that another person or organization is responsible for crisis events.

*Evading Responsibility*: Development of excuses for crisis. (a) *Provocation*: A subset of evading responsibility that suggests the wrongdoing was a response to previous wrongful acts that provoked the offender. (b) *Defeasibility*: A subset of evading responsibility that argues that lack of information or control over events caused the wrongful act. (c) *Accidents*: A subset of evading responsibility that points to

unforeseeable circumstances as a self-defense strategy. (d) *Good Intentions*: A subset of evading responsibility through which the accused presents praiseworthy motives as a way to reduce responsibility for a wrongful act.

*Reducing Offensiveness*: Using discourse to make the crisis appear less offensive. (a) *Bolstering*: A subset of reducing offensiveness, this response uses positive comments in the hope of strengthening the public's opinion about the organization. (b) *Minimization*: A subset of reducing offensiveness, an attempt to reduce the offensiveness of the act/crisis by downplaying negative outcomes of the crisis. (c) *Differentiation*: A subset of reducing offensiveness, requires institutions to present examples of similar issues but those that feature more severe harm. Although not discussed in the literature, this researcher suggests that universities and colleges engage in a type of differentiation when they cite a "growing trend" as the root of a crisis situation. (d) *Transcendence:* A subset of reducing offensiveness, this discourse highlights the greater good that comes from the organization's actions. (e) *Attack the accuser or offer/give compensation*: Subsets of reducing offensiveness, these require striking back or making up.

*Mortification*: Admitting to the act, asking forgiveness, and apologizing.

*Corrective Action*: Attempts to repair existing damages and/or prevent future recurrence of the wrongful act. True corrective action requires real, long-term changes.

In particular, this study verified the essential nature of corrective action as a response to a campus crisis. Well documented in the body of knowledge concerning corporate crises, corrective action is a must for today's university in crisis as it seeks to restore its image in an environment where calls for accountability are strong and growing

stronger. While mixed results were recorded in response to the use of defeasibility and good intentions (subsets of evading responsibility), unique and interesting results were found regarding the use of bolstering and differentiation (subsets of reducing offensiveness). Results suggest that when employing bolstering discourse, a university would be wise to emphasize a focus on students and families rather than focusing on the university itself. It also appears from this study that bolstering used in a defensive context may not result in positive perceptions. Also based on the results of this study, universities should use differentiation cautiously. While administrators equated citing a trend with giving the public the larger context of the fire safety issue, for alumni, this form of differentiation sounded like an excuse. The present study also succeeded in adding credence to the suggestions made by Burns and Bruner (2000). The internet is an essential communication tool for universities in crisis. Student-focused symbols, such as scholarships, are also viewed as important. And, adding interviews and focus groups to the exploration of Image Restoration Discourse Theory, as recommended by Burns and Bruner (2000), added to the depth of findings. Finally, the results of the present study leads this researcher to agree with a recommendation made by Burns and Bruner (2000) and agreed to by Beniot (2000) to revise the name of Image Restoration Discourse Theory to Image Repair Discourse Theory. The researchers note that replacing "restoration" with "repair" more clearly communicates that an image can never return to the state that it was in prior to the crisis.

In this study, the elements of Image Restoration Discourse Theory used by Seton Hall in response to a residence hall fire that took the lives of 3 students and injured nearly 60 others were identified and described through a case study. Perceptions of Seton Hall's

communication response were examined through focus groups interviews with alumni who completed an undergraduate degree at the University between May 1995 and May 2000 and who lived in New Jersey in 2000, and through interviews with key administrators central to the University's crisis response.

The specific question asked in the study was: What elements of Image Restoration Discourse Theory were present in Seton Hall University's response to the tragic January 2000 dormitory fire that took the lives of three students and injured more than 60?

Specific findings begin with the Seton Hall crisis communication plan. A crisis communication plan is a practical framework for communication when a crisis occurs and that incorporates the tactical "lessons learned" from similar institutions that have faced crisis events in the past. The majority of Seton Hall administrators noted that non-communication logistics such as security, relocation of students and evacuation were planned for, as well as basic communication procedures such as phone chains, designated meeting places and a commitment to communicate with the press. More than half (57.1%) of the participating administrators, however, did not know if the plan included a communication philosophy or commitment to a specific type of communication discourse. The apparent absence of a full-fledged crisis communication plan at Seton Hall is consistent with researchers' expectations. Although some researchers (Kennedy, 1999b; Wilson, 1992) note the need for colleges and universities to develop crisis communication plans, just how many institutions have such plans in place is not known. Findings do suggest, however, that Seton Hall may have been more prepared than most universities. For instance, Larry Smith, president of the Institute for Crisis Management noted that "based on calls from colleges and universities, very few have a crisis

communication plan...and most haven't even thought about it" (personal communication, September 27, 2001). Seton Hall University had thought about crisis. And, while Hill and Knowlton's Crisis Team (personal communication, August 14, 2001) noted that "public relations and communication planning at most colleges remains focused on fund raising...[and that] even recent, major campus tragedies have not sent a wake-up call," Seton Hall University administrators were aware and somewhat prepared for the communication demands and responsibilities presented by a campus crisis.

Evidence of Seton Hall's crisis awareness is seen in the perception of alumni and administrators that the University had a crisis communication goal at the time of the fire. More specifically, 50% of alumni and most of the administrators (71.4%) felt that the goal of Seton Hall's crisis communication plan was to focus on the human element or more specifically, to show concern for students, focus on Seton Hall's Catholic mission and communicate care for students.

The study also identified and analyzed alumni and administrators' views of elements of image restoration discourse used by Seton Hall during and after its crisis as positive, negative or neutral. Interesting findings were noted regarding several elements of image restoration discourse.

Because of nearly immediate media speculation during and after the Seton Hall crisis about students or visitors who might have started the tragic fire, the first element of Image Restoration Discourse Theory examined with alumni and administrators was shifting the blame. A subset of denial, this tactic is used by some organizations undergoing crisis in an attempt to refocus attention elsewhere or suggest that another person or organization was responsible for the crisis events (Brinson & Beniot, 1996).

Seton Hall University did not shift the blame during its communication response to the fire. Doing so, as one administrator noted in the in-depth interview, would "be clearly blaming the victim." Another said shifting the blame is "not what a Catholic university would do." Alumni participants agreed that Seton Hall had a moral responsibility for the fire and that shifting the blame "would look bad." The literature supports the finding that "shifting the blame is not considered by those who are injured by the [corporation's or individual's] actions to be as appropriate or effective as other potential image restoration strategies"(Brinson & Beniot, 1994, p. 87), and that doing so may even intensify damage to the organization's public image (Sellnow, Ulmer, & Snider, 1998). Seton Hall administrators clearly understood the public's perception that the University was morally responsible for the tragedy and did not consider shifting the blame. Interestingly, however, in two of the three focus groups, alumni equated the University's statement that "67% of universities did not have sprinklers" as a form of denial. While follow-up comments with alumni were largely neutral, this finding emphasizes the public's skepticism toward organizations in crises as well as the high level of accountability demanded of universities (Ratcliff, 1995), particularly universities experiencing crisis. Clearly, universities must think twice before using any form of denial in their response to a crisis.

In an attempt to assign accountability, reporters quickly began to focus on the fact that Boland Hall did not have an appropriate fire response system. Media efforts to fix blame were direct and intense. Initial Seton Hall responses contained elements of defeasibility and good intentions. A subset of evading responsibility, defeasibility argues that lack of information or minimal control over events caused the wrongful act. Also a

subset of evading responsibility, good intentions highlights the organization's efforts to do the right thing. Seton Hall first used defeasibility at a noon press conference on January 19, just hours after the fire when it explained that Boland Hall had received recent and complete authorization from fire and safety officials as a safe residence hall. The next day, elements of defeasibility and good intentions were evident in the statement that "no alarms are considered false at Seton Hall, each prompts the appropriate response." As the sprinkler system continued to be a major story and reporters asked about disconnected hoses found in Boland Hall, defeasibility continued to be used as a response, with the hoses described as "obsolete" and "nothing that could be used by firefighters today." While the body of knowledge regarding the usefulness of defeasibility and good intentions is limited, in Seton Hall's case, results were mixed. Comments about safety authorization and responsiveness to alarms were viewed positively by more than half of alumni and administrators. Statements about the disconnected hoses, however, were seen by alumni as significantly more negative (78.9%) than they were by administrators, who were largely neutral (57.1%) about the statements. The difference may be that the first two defeasibility statements used positive language about authorization and responsiveness, while the third, more negatively phrased statement could imply a lack of readiness. While administrators wanted to build context with the statement about Boland Hall hoses, it appeared to make alumni uneasy. More research needs to be done regarding university use of defeasibility and good intentions as crisis responses.

A third option in response to crisis is attempting to reduce the offensiveness of the act. This strategy includes six variations. Two of these variations – bolstering and

differentiation – were used by Seton Hall University in its response to the residence hall fire. The first, bolstering, uses positive comments in the hope of strengthening the public's opinion about the organization. Previous research includes several examples of corporations using bolstering during crises as they describe offensive acts/crises scenarios as "unacceptable," "never tolerated here," and against corporate policies and core values (Brinson & Benoit, 1999). These studies note that bolstering is most effective in restoring social legitimacy when messages emphasize the values held by and cultural expectations of the publics and shared by the institution. Results from the analysis of the Seton Hall crisis agree with previous findings that statements emphasizing expected values are more positively received than those that can be viewed as simply bolstering the institution. The bolstering statements Seton Hall University made that focused more specifically on "students and their families" and Seton Hall as a "strong, special community" were viewed more positively by administrators (the source of the message) than alumni (one of several groups of key receivers of the message). More than 70% of administrators positively viewed bolstering statements, noting that the University is a "special strong community" (71.4%) and that its "commitment has not changed" (71.4%). While the statement did not have the same positive effect on alumni, the response was not negative. Across all focus groups, 47.4% had a neutral reaction to the "special strong community" statement, and 26.3% were neural to the "commitment has not changed" statement. Across alumni groups, however, 18.4 % viewed the University's less value-centered statement that its "commitment has not changed" statement as negative. It is important to note that the "commitment has not changed" bolstering statement was made in defense of the University. As the present case study shows, University President Monsignor Sheeran

made the statement after lawyers for the families of two deceased students and three injured students held a press conference to announce intent to sue the University. After commenting on the University's commitment, Monsignor Sheeran strongly made "a simple, but important distinction. These grieving families and their attorneys are not one in the same. I am not naïve about the law and tactics used in the pursuit of justice. However, when attorneys question our compassion, and the care and support of this community, I take umbrage." In appears from the study of Seton Hall University that bolstering used in a defensive context may not result in the positive response typically expected. Examining Seton Hall's use of bolstering does, however, underscore the importance of emphasizing expected values when making such statements.

Seton Hall also used differentiation to reduce offensiveness. This tactic requires institutions to present examples of similar issues but those that feature more severe harm. A review of university responses to crisis for the present study revealed a trend among universities in crisis to differentiate by citing a "growing trend" as the root of a crisis situation. While not specifically identified in the literature, the "growing trend" response is evident in campus responses to crises that include drinking incidents (Enders, 2000), racial issues, and student cheating. Differentiation by citing a growing trend was used by Seton Hall during its crisis when the University emphasized the fact that the majority of residence halls in the country do not have sprinklers, thus suggesting a larger trend/issues as the underlying crisis. Based upon the results of the present study, universities should use this form of differentiation cautiously. While the majority of Seton Hall administrators equated citing a trend with giving the public the larger context of the fire safety issue and were (42.9%) neutral in their response to the statement, more than 60%

(63.2%) of alumni viewed the statement as negative. While not a single subject responded that citing a trend alleviated Seton Hall's responsibility for the crisis, 71.4% of administrators felt that citing a national trend somewhat built compassion for a university in crisis in providing context for others viewing the crisis. Administrators were clear in their desire to present Seton Hall as a typical university grappling with a crisis that could have happened anywhere. More than 50% (55.3%) of all alumni, however, felt that citing a national trend did not build compassion and, in fact, appeared as an excuse. Alumni expressed a clear sense of Seton Hall's mission and a view that Seton Hall is a good place that should lead positive trends rather than follow negative ones. The negative reaction to citing a trend evident among alumni in this study may be specific to the alumni public. University alumni have, for years, been the recipient of University messages that note distinction. While citing a trend may build context for those outside the university community, for alumni, it sounded like an excuse.

Future study of university use of differentiation by citing a national trend should compare the views of internal versus external recipients of the message. In addition, the context in which reference to national and other trends are made must be further explored, as what is said in response to direct questioning from the media may differ from what universities would choose to say. Future researchers must examine if universities citing a trend to differentiate their crises were asked to provide statistics that represent larger issues or introduced the trend into the crisis response on their own accord.

The final element of communication discourse analyzed was corrective action, or "attempts to repair existing damages and/or to prevent future recurrence of the wrongful

act" (Brinson & Benoit, 1999, p. 3). Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) explain that, "unlike compensation, which seeks to pay for a problem, corrective action seeks to prevent or correct" (p. 45). Corrective action means making real, long-term changes within an organization. The image restoration discourse literature clearly highlights the assumption that organizations facing crises must take some degree of responsibility if they hope to restore their social legitimacy. Corrective action speeds up this process (Sellnow, Ulmer & Snider, 1998). Companies that fail to accept responsibility can intensify their image problems. The present study agrees with previous research noting the value of corrective action taken and publicized. In short, universities in crisis, like corporations in crisis, must take corrective action following a crisis to regain social legitimacy.

The present study first explored alumni and administrator response to statements focusing on the intent to take corrective action. Interestingly, the University's statements of intent to take corrective action were viewed nearly as positively as the corrective action itself, with no significant difference between the two groups of respondents. Most positive, however, and in agreement with previous literature, were responses to the specific correction action taken by Seton Hall. All actions, including setting up an 800 number, creating a student-only section of the Student Center, and making counseling available were seen as positive by at least 71.1% of both alumni and administrators. True corrective action, the installation of sprinklers in all residence halls, was view as positive by 89.5% of alumni and 100% of administrators. In fact, focus group responses were 100%, 80.0%, and 89.5% positive.

Interestingly, when alumni focus groups were asked a question about corrective action restated in a more personal way, significant differences in responses were noted.

Each alumnus was asked how the installation of sprinklers contributed "to your feelings about Seton Hall post crisis." The responses to this question were much more neutral. In fact, 83.3% of alumni provided a neutral response to this question, with focus group 1 at 92.9% neutral and focus group 2 at 93.3% neutral. Clarification of neutral responses resulted in explanations that centered on beliefs that the University was "required" to take corrective action. Alumni noted, for instance, that the installation of sprinklers" was the right thing to do," "a no brainer," and "they had to do it." This finding again underscores the clear and high level of accountability demanded of universities (Ratcliff, 1995), particularly of universities experiencing crisis. While a public corporation taking corrective action may be perceived as going beyond expectations, a university may, it appears from this study, be expected to do so, particularly if that university is a Catholic university. The differences that may exist deserve further study.

As Burns and Bruner (2000) suggested, another type of discourse worthy of analysis is the use of symbols. In the present study, respondents were asked if symbolic acts of remembrance/memorials contributed to image restoration after Seton Hall's campus crisis, these include the establishment of a scholarship fund, a bell tower and a memorial garden. All subjects expressed positive views about the university's acts of remembrance. The most positive response related to the establishment of a scholarship fund (89.5% of alumni and 85.7% of administrators), followed by the erection of a memorial bell tower (81.6% of alumni and 71.4% of administrators), and the development of a memorial garden (76.3% of alumni and 71.4% of administrators).

When subjects were asked the "effect Seton Hall memorials of fire victims had on their view of the University post crisis," there were no significant differences in the

responses of alumni and administrators. Across all alumni groups, 76.3% felt the effect was positive, as did 71.4% of administrators. Significant differences, however, were found for responses to the question "do you perceive long-term remembrances of the fire as necessary for Seton Hall." While 100% of administrators noted that long-term remembrances are necessary for Seton Hall, half of all alumni said long-term remembrances were just somewhat necessary for the University. Alumni responses focused on a concern that constant reminders might inhibit enrollment or cause concern among new students. When subjects were asked how a university honor/remember those affected by a crisis on campus, the majority of administrators included commentary about how culture – and, specifically Seton Hall's Catholic culture – should impact a university's remembrances. Administrators agreed that remembrance flows from the culture of an institution, and that Seton Hall's Catholic mission guided the creation of memorials. Alumni were much less focused on culture/the Catholic culture in their responses. Alumni simply noted the value of remembering without expressing views on why the University remembers. For alumni, memorials are clearly an expectation.

The body of knowledge on Image Restoration Discourse Theory emphasizes that no one strategy or combination of strategies is best for all organizations in all crisis situations. The study of Seton Hall University's crisis, however, does present some interesting considerations for universities in crisis. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is that an analysis of communication discourse during a crisis yields important insight not evident from an investigation of public relations tactics. If public relations professionals on college campuses really want to dissect the success of their crisis response, they must consider their discourse. The outcome of the Seton Hall fire and the University's ability

to repair its image is as much about what it said as about what it did during and after the Boland Hall crisis. Words, in this case, spoke as loudly as actions. The analysis also highlights the importance of corrective action when a crisis occurs at an institution that considers itself (and promotes itself as) a "community." Corrective action "attempts to repair existing damages and/or to prevent future recurrence of the wrongful act (Brinson & Beniot, 1999, p. 3). Sellnow, Ulmer and Snider (1998) called corrective action an initial and primary means to restore an organization's public image, finding that "taking some degree of responsibility for the crisis during critical periods and providing corrective action can expedite the organization's efforts to rebuild its legitimacy" (p. 61). Are universities in particular – home to so many young people and considered a "safe haven" at which young adults can grow and mature – required to take such action? Is corrective action, for instance, even more important following a crisis at Seton Hall or Texas A&M than following a crisis at Johnson and Johnson or Exxon? From this research, it appears so. What happens to universities that do not take corrective action following a campus crisis, that do not make real, long-term changes on campus? How do key publics perceive symbolic corrective acts in the short- and long-term? While this study begins that exploration and underscores the essential nature of corrective action for universities in crisis, more research is necessary. Additional research too is important to draw out more meaningful conclusions about other elements of Image Restoration Discourse Theory in relation to campus crises. Perhaps most intriguing is the growing use among universities in crisis (and, in particular, at Seton Hall) of differentiation by citing a growing trend. Although Seton Hall was able to reframe its message with this approach, the University was also negatively portrayed in the media for attending to its image (by

pointing out the bigger picture, aka: the lack of sprinkler systems in college residence halls nationwide). A key question about this approach to communication discourse is whether it is useful in today's media environment, where coverage of higher education is becoming more investigative, aggressive, and similar to coverage of corporations, politicians, and the entertainment industry. Does use of this strategy focus too much attention on the image repair efforts themselves? Do key university publics view image repair as negatively as the press seems to view it? It is quite possible that students and alumni, for instance, do not disagree with attention to image. While the majority of administrators in this study noted that citing a trend builds context for message receivers, half of the alumni participants responded that citing a trend sounds like an excuse. How do other university publics perceive this element of Image Restoration Discourse Theory? How and why has the tactic evolved? Clearly, further research in needed regarding this topic. The study of Seton Hall's residence hall fire also raises questions about how accountability, context and culture may affect a university's response in time of crisis. Finally, the Seton Hall case presents a question about the responses not chosen in a crisis. Are, for instance, the responses a university does not make to a crisis just as important as those it does make? Why didn't Seton Hall use denial, minimalization, or mortification in its response? What has happened at universities that have used these elements of Image Restoration Theory as part of their response to crisis? Results from this study lead the researcher to conclude that these approaches would have had seriously negative implications for Seton Hall University.

Also worthy of additional research, as suggested by Burns and Bruner (2000), are the types of communication vehicles that organizations use to deliver their crisis

communication. This question is not explored in previous research. In the present study, however, the Web was clearly viewed as the most positive vehicle of communication used to deliver crisis messages. The majority of responses from alumni (n=18) and administrators (n=8) noted that the Seton Hall University Web site was the most positive vehicle of communication used during and post crisis. It is important to note that Seton Hall University was among the first universities in the nation to become wireless. Use of laptop technology was and is second nature at the University, as it is today on many campuses. The Web site was followed by media reports of students and emergency personnel "heros" (alumni n=7; administrators n=1). Interestingly, in two focus groups, these two top replies were followed by word of mouth (focus group 1 n=3; focus group 2 n=2). Single administrators mentioned the Seton Hall 800 number and coverage of the fire by the Seton Hall University radio station as the most positive vehicle.

Alumni and administrators were also asked which vehicle of communication most negatively influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis. The majority of responses from alumni (n=30) and administrators (n=5) noted that media reports of the Seton Hall fire were the most negative vehicles of communication during and post crisis. Media reports were followed by word of mouth reports (alumni n=3; administrators n=1). Of interest in this analysis are participants' qualitative responses following up on initial responses, particularly from administrators. While most (n=5) administrators noted that media reports had the most negative influence on the image of the University, the majority characterized media reports as "fair and factual. While two alumni focus groups agreed that media reports were "fair" in their follow-up discussions, the comments from focus group 2 were more harsh, pointing out, for instance, that the media was

"misinformed and searching for answers" and "using the word 'alleged' all the time, speculating about deaths and other things that were worse than what they were."

Related to the topic of vehicles of communication is Seton Hall's partnering with a public relations firm for [communication] support during and after the fire. This is also not explored in previous research. In the present study, while alumni and administrator responses were not significantly different, answers did identity a difference between groups in the perceived value of partnering with an outside public relations firm during a crisis. No administrators thought the partnership was negative. However, 18.4% of all alumni did see the move as negative. The remainder and majority of responses from both groups of subjects were positive (alumni were 39.5% positive; administrators were 57.1% positive), or neutral (alumni were 42.1% neutral; administrators were 42.9% neutral). The public's perception of communication vehicles though which a university crisis is communicated and of university partnerships with outside public relations consultants during crisis deserves further attention. For media savvy publics, the delivery and crafting of messages used during a crisis may be just as impactful on image restoration as message content.

In conclusion, the results of the present study leads this researcher to agree with a recommendation made by Burns and Bruner (2000) and agreed to by Benoit (2000) to revise the name of Image Restoration Discourse Theory to Image Repair Discourse Theory. The researchers note that replacing "restoration" with "repair" more clearly communicates that an image can never return to the state that it was in prior to the crisis. The evidence in the present study shows that while none of the alumni or administrators held negative perceptions of Seton Hall prior to the crisis, more alumni responses were

negative and neutral post-crisis. Overall, 41.6% of alumni held to their positive perceptions of the University. However, 11.1% noted a negative perception and 47.2% noted a neutral perception. Clearly, for the Seton Hall alumni who participated in this study, the University image was repaired, not restored. Interestingly, administrator responses seems to point to a restoration of image. In fact, all administrators (100%) described their perception of the University after the fire as positive. Perhaps administrators' views of the University and the University's strength to weather crisis were strengthened by the process of handling the tragedy. Alumni did not feel the same. These differences in opinion about image restoration versus repair among these two publics and other university publics also warrants further attention.

The Seton Hall fire, as noted in this research, drew national attention to the University and prompted a national movement to install fire sprinklers and improve safety in campus residence halls nationwide. It also led to an extensive arson investigation. In June 2003, a special grand jury in Newark, New Jersey indicted two former Seton Hall students on murder and arson charges following an investigation that lasted more than three years. The students have admitted to drunken horseplay in the residence hall lounge in the hours before the fire. They deny setting the fire. At the writing of this paper, the case continues to crawl slowly through the courts. Meanwhile, the three students who died in the fire are remembered through symbols that are now part of Seton Hall University's culture, an annual memorial mass, the ringing (each half hour) of three silver bells in a tower dedicated to their memory, and a stone placed at the entrance to Boland Hall inscribed with one word, "Remember."

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Appendix A

Letter from researcher to administrators

## Letter of Solicitation

Dear Potential Subjects:

My name is Kathleen Donohue Rennie and I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University, in the College of Education and Human Services. I have been a Faculty Associate in the Seton Hall Department of Communication for 10 years.

I am writing to request your participation in an in-depth interview regarding Seton Hall's Boland Hall fire.

The data gained from the interviews will be included in my dissertation, which examines and describes how elements of image restoration discourse assist universities in their efforts to retain/regain social legitimacy (public perception that the institution is good, credible and honest) after a serious crisis. It is my hope that the exploration will assist all campus communicators and other administrators in managing crisis events.

I plan to conduct the interviews in June and July of 2003. Each interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted at a location and time that is convenient for you. I will contact you to schedule the interview only after I receive notice of your approval. You can choose to participate by completing the attached reply slip and returning it in the envelope provided by June 16, 2003.

### 1. The researcher's affiliation with Seton Hall University.
I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University, in the College of Education and Human Services. I have been a Faculty Associate in the Seton Hall Department of Communication for 10 years.

### 2. Purpose of the research and the expected duration of the subject's participation.
I am conducting a study to identify, describe, and analyze the image restoration communication present in Seton Hall University's response to the January 2000 dormitory fire. Subject participation will consist of a voluntary interview. For those choosing to be interviewed, participation is expected to take approximately 60 minutes. Questions are attached.

### 3.     Procedures to be followed.
You have been identified as an individual with a role in planning, managing and/or evaluating Seton Hall University's response to the Boland Hall dormitory fire. With your permission, I will administer the attached interview questions and record responses on audio-tape.

### 4.     Voluntary nature of project.
Your participation in this interview is totally voluntary. You can discontinue the interview at any time without penalty.

**5.      Statement of anonymity.**
Anonymity of the final data is insured. Responses will be coded. Responses will NOT be attributed to any specific participant by name, title or otherwise.

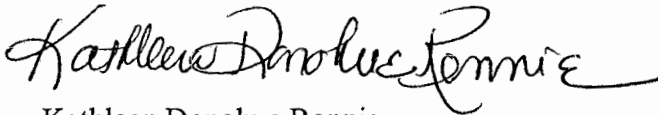**6.      Storing subject responses and confidentiality.**
Interview responses will be recorded (on an audio cassette) with your permission and transcribed without identification of any specific individual by name, title or otherwise. Confidentiality is insured because data will be transcribed without identification of any particular individual. Responses will be coded.

I will maintain the transcribed information for three years in a locked safe. At the end of this period, the transcriptions will be destroyed.  No one else will have access to the information except for my mentor(by request) and committee members (by request).

**7. This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached at (973) 275-2974.**

I appreciate your support and thank you for your anticipated participation. If you have further questions about my research and/or research subject rights, please contact me at the phone number or e-mail address below.

Regards,

*Kathleen Donohue Rennie*

Kathleen Donohue Rennie
908-851-0804
KathDRenn@aol.com

ENCL: interview questions

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

You can agree to participate in the in-depth interviews described above by filling out the following information and mailing it to me in the enclosed addressed/stamped envelope by June 16, 2003. I will contact you to schedule a date and time for the interview. All interviews will take place in a public meeting room in the Seton Hall University Library.

Your signature below notes agreement to participate in the interview:

................................................................................................................

Phone number: ........................           E-mail address: ........................

# SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

1 8 5 6

## Informed Consent Form

**1.     The researcher's affiliation with Seton Hall University.**
The researcher is Kathleen Donohue Rennie, a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University, in the College of Education and Human Services. She has been a Faculty Associate in the Seton Hall Department of Communication for 10 years.

**2.     Purpose of the research and the expected duration of the subject's participation.**
The researcher is conducting a study to identify and describe the elements of Image Restoration Discourse Theory present in Seton Hall University's response to the tragic January 2000 dormitory fire. Subject participation will consist of a voluntary interview. For those choosing to be interviewed, participation is expected to take approximately 60 minutes.

**3.     Procedures to be followed.**
I have been identified as an individual with a role in planning, managing and/or evaluating Seton Hall University's response to the dormitory fire. I received a letter of solicitation from the researcher stating the purpose of the study, requesting participation, suggesting an interview schedule, and including sample questions. I self-selected inclusion in a 60 minute interview about the University's efforts to restore its image after the Boland Hall fire.

**4.     Voluntary nature of project.**
I understand that the interview is completely voluntary. I can discontinue the interview at any time without penalty.

**5.     Statement of anonymity.**
Anonymity of the final data is insured. Responses will be coded. Responses will NOT be attributed to me or any participant by name, title or otherwise.

**6.     Storing subject responses and confidentiality.**
Confidentiality is insured because data will be transcribed without identification of any particular individual by name, title or otherwise. Responses will NOT be attributed to me or any specific participant. Interview responses will be recorded (on an audio cassette) with my permission and transcribed without identification of any specific individual.

> **APPROVED**
>
> APR 2 3 2003
>
> IRB
> SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

ENRICHING THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT

**7.** Statement describing to what extent records will be kept confidential, including a description of who may have access to research records.

The researcher will maintain the transcribed information for three years in a locked safe. At the end of this period, the transcriptions will be destroyed. No one else will have access to the information except for the researcher's mentor (Dr. Joseph Stetar, by request) and her committee members (by request).

**8.** Anticipated risks to the subjects by taking part in this study.

Although no risks are anticipated by taking part in this interview, as a subject, I understand that I may become emotionally upset by references to and discussions about the Seton Hall University fire. If this happens, I know I can contact Seton Hall University Counseling Services at 973-761-9500 for assistance.

**9.** Expected benefits to the subjects for taking part in this study.

The results of this study can assist campus communicators and other administrators in more effectively manage crisis situations. The study can help to more precisely identify differences between a campus crisis and a corporate crisis. Repairing a university's image during and post crisis may differ in meaningful ways from restoring product, brand or corporate image.

**10.** Permission for audio-tape.

The researcher will administer interview questions and record my responses on audio-tape. She has my permission to audio-tape my responses. I have the right to review all or any portion of the tape and request that it be destroyed.

**11.** If I have any further questions about the research and research subject rights, I will contact Kathleen Donohue Rennie at 908-851-0804 or her mentor, Dr. Joseph Stetar at 973-275-2730.

**12.** I have been given two copies of the Informed Consent Form. I will sign and date the copies and keep one copy for your records.

**13.** This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached at (973) 275-2974.
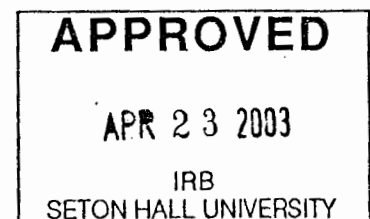I have read the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realizing that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

_____        _____

Subject's Signature                                    Date

**Questions for the in-depth interviews:**

1. What do you believe were the elements of the Seton Hall University crisis plan at the time of the fire?

2. What do you believe was the goal of Seton Hall University's crisis communication plan at the time of the fire?

3. Did the plan include a communication philosophy, a suggested approach for how the university would communicate during a crisis (ie: a statement of openness, honestly, etc.)?

4. Did the plan include a commitment to a particular type of communication discourse, a suggested approach for communication (ie: corrective action, a focus on apology, etc.)?

5. How do you believe each of the following statements influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis? Describe the nature of this influence as positive, negative, neutral, or other.
   • "The university is setting up a toll free phone number for parents and students."
   • "Our focus today [the day of the fire] as a university community is to tend to the needs of our students and their families – that is the focus for today."
   • "We are a special, strong community."
   • "The smoke alarm and pull stations were tested yesterday (Tuesday, January 19, 2000) by an external inspection company as part of a routine inspection performed every other month. The building's alarm system is in total working order and is electronically checked daily. The alarms are responded to by Seton Hall University's Department of Public Safety. Fire extinguishers are also checked every other month. The fire extinguishers were last inspected on November 23, 1999 with no problems noted."
   • "We can not respond to that particular issue [of why the fire occurred]…it is part of an on-going investigation."
   • "No false alarms are considered false at Seton Hall. Each prompt the appropriate response."
   • "The disconnected hoses in Boland Hall were antiquated…nothing that would be used by firefighters today."
   • "More than 65% of all dormitories in the state are not equipped with sprinklers."
   • "You don't go through something like this without introspection, whether individually or as a group…sprinkler systems are just one aspect of an overall fire plan. Fire walls, smoke detectors and security officers are also important. We will consider anything and everything to make sure that something like this never, ever happens again."
   • "Seton Hall's fire safety systems in Boland Hall performed properly in the January 19 fire. All six of Seton Hall's residence halls have smoke detectors in every room, common areas, and hallways; as well as fire doors and pull stations. Two of Seton Hall's residence halls – Boland, where the fire occurred, and Aquinas – will now be equipped with sprinkler

systems. All other residence halls will be expanded. Building codes have served as a baseline for sprinkler systems. The University will now be exceeding those standards."
• "Seton Hall's commitment has not changed since January 19. These students and their families who have been affected by the fire continue to be our first priority. Today, I want to make a simple, but important distinction. These grieving families and their attorneys are not one in the same. I am not naïve about the law and tactics used in the pursuit of justice. However, when attorneys questions our compassion, and the care and support of this community, I take umbrage."

6. In your opinion, why did the University communicate the fact that Seton Hall was not legally required to equip its dormitories with sprinklers?

7. In your opinion, why didn't the University shift the blame for the fire to students/visitors who may have set it?

8. In your opinion, why didn't the University deny responsibility for the crisis?

9. In your opinion, does citing a national trend for a campus crisis (ie: that false alarms are a problem at campuses throughout the nation, not just at Seton Hall) build compassion for a campus undergoing a crisis connected to that trend?

10. In your opinion, why did the University note that nearly 67% of the nation's campuses with residence halls were not fully equipped with sprinkler systems at the time of the Seton Hall crisis?

11. How do you believe each of the following actions influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis? Describe the nature of this influence (positive, negative, neutral, other).
    • Setting up an 800 number for information
    • Setting up the University Center as a student-only location during and after the fire
    • Immediately making counseling available and urging use of counsels
    • Arranging an evening prayer service on the night of the fire
    • Holding a memorial service
    • Partnering with Lipman Hearne, a public relations firm, for support during the post crisis
    • Erecting a memorial bell tower
    • Establishing a scholarship fund
    • Installing sprinklers in all dormitory buildings
    • Developing a memorial garden outside Boland Hall

12. In your opinion, what vehicles of communication (ie: University web site, University phone calls, reports from friends and family, media reports) positively influenced Seton Hall's image during and after the crisis?

13. In your opinion, what vehicles of communication (ie: University web site, University phone calls, reports from friends and family, media reports) negatively influenced Seton Hall's image during and after the crisis?

14. How would you characterize media reports during Seton Hall's response to the fire?

15. To your knowledge, did the Seton Hall crisis plan include a commitment to taking corrective action post crisis?

16. In your opinion, how should a university honor/remember those affected by a crisis on campus?

17. What effect do the Seton Hall memorials to fire victims have on your view of the university post-crisis?

18. Do you perceive long-term remembrances of the fire as necessary for Seton Hall? Why?

19. What was your perception of Seton Hall University's image pre-crisis?

20. What is your perception of Seton Hall University image post-crisis?

Appendix B

Letter to alumni

# Letter of Solicitation

Dear Potential Subjects:

Hello. Like you, I am an alumna of Seton Hall University. Over the past nine years, I have taught in the Communications Department. I am writing to request your participation in a focus group interview regarding Seton Hall's Boland Hall fire.

The data gained from the interviews will be included in my dissertation, which examines and describes how elements of image restoration discourse assist universities in their efforts to retain/regain social legitimacy (public perception that the institution is good, credible and honest) after a serious crisis. It is my hope that the exploration will assist all campus communicators and other administrators in managing crisis events.

I plan to conduct the interviews in June and July of 2003. Each interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted in a public meeting room in the Seton Hall University Library. Refreshments and a special thank you gift will be provided.

I will contact you to schedule the interview only after I receive notice of your approval. You can choose to participate by completing the attached reply slip and returning it in the envelope provided by June 16, 2003.

I appreciate your support and thank you for your anticipated participation. If you have further questions that are not answered below about my research and/or research subject rights, please contact me at the phone number or e-mail address below.

## 1. The researcher's affiliation with Seton Hall University.
My name is Kathleen Donohue Rennie and I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University, in the College of Education and Human Services. I have been a Faculty Associate in the Seton Hall Department of Communication for 10 years.

## 2. Purpose of the research and the expected duration of the subject's participation.
I am conducting a study to identify, describe, and analyze the image restoration communication present in Seton Hall University's response to the January 2000 dormitory fire. Subject participation will consist of voluntary participation in a focus group interview. For those choosing to be interviewed, participation is expected to take approximately 60 minutes. Questions are attached.

## 3. Procedures to be followed.

Access to your address (and those of other alumni) was approved by the University's Assistant Vice President of Alumni Relations. Alumni listed in the 2000 Seton Hall University Alumni Directory who completed an undergraduate degree at the University between May 1995 and May 2000 and who lived in New Jersey in 2000 were identified electronically by the Seton Hall Office of Alumni Relations. A random sample of focus group participants will be drawn from those of you who self-select inclusion in my focus group interviews.

With your permission, I will administer the attached focus group interview questions and record responses on an audio cassette.

## 4. Voluntary nature of project.

Your participation in this focus group is completely voluntary. You can discontinue participation in the focus group interview at any time without penalty.

## 5. Statement of anonymity.

Anonymity of the final data is insured. Responses will be coded. Responses will NOT be attributed to any specific participant by name, title of otherwise. Although researcher anonymity is insured, focus group participants may potentially communicate information discussed in the focus groups to others.

## 6. Storing subject responses and confidentiality.

Confidentiality of the final data is insured because data will be transcribed without identification of any particular individual. Responses will NOT be attributed to any specific participant. Responses will be recorded (on an audio cassette) with your permission and transcribed without identification of any specific individual by name, title or otherwise.
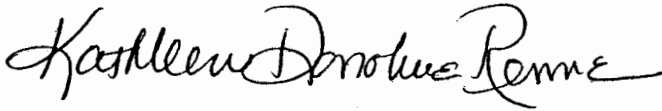
Although researcher confidentiality is insured, focus group participants may potentially communicate information discussed in the focus groups to others.

I will maintain the transcribed information for three years in a locked safe. At the end of this period, the transcriptions will be destroyed. No one else will have access to the information except for my mentor (by request) and committee members (by request).
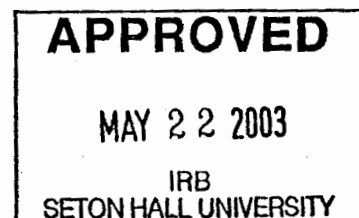
**7. This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached at (973) 275-2974.**

Regards,

*Kathleen Donohue Rennie*

Kathleen Donohue Rennie
908-851-0804
KathDRenn@aol.com

ENCL.: focus group interview questions

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You can contact me regarding participation in the focus group interviews described above by filling out the following information and mailing it to me in the enclosed addressed/stamped envelope by June 16, 2003. I will contact you to schedule a date and time for the interview. All focus group interviews will take place in a public meeting room in the Seton Hall University Library.

Your signature below notes agreement to participate in the interview questions:

..............................................................................................................................

Phone number: ..............................        E-mail address: ...........................

**Questions for the focus group interviews:**

1. How do you believe each of the following statements influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis? Describe the nature of this influence as positive, negative, neutral, or other.
   - "The university is setting up a toll free phone number for parents and students."
   - "Our focus today [the day of the fire] as a university community is to tend to the needs of our students and their families – that is the focus for today."
   - "We are a special, strong community."
   - "The smoke alarm and pull stations were tested yesterday (Tuesday, January 19, 2000) by an external inspection company as part of a routine inspection performed every other month. The building's alarm system is in total working order and is electronically checked daily. The alarms are responded to by Seton Hall University's Department of Public Safety. Fire extinguishers are also checked every other month. The fire extinguishers were last inspected on November 23, 1999 with no problems noted."
   - "We can not respond to that particular issue [of why the fire occurred]... it is part of an on-going investigation."
   - "No false alarms are considered false at Seton Hall. Each prompt the appropriate response."
   - "The disconnected hoses in Boland Hall were antiquated... nothing that would be sued by firefighters today."
   - "More than 65% of all dormitories in the state are not equipped with sprinklers."
   - "You don't go through something like this without introspection, whether individually or as a group... sprinkler systems are just one aspect of an overall fire place. Fire walls, smoke detectors and security officers are also important. We will consider anything and everything to make sure that something like this never, ever happens again."
   - "Seton Hall's fire safety systems in Boland Hall performed properly in the January 19 fire. All six of Seton Hall's residence halls have smoke detectors in every room, common areas, and hallways; as well as fire doors and pull stations. Two of Seton Hall's residence halls – Boland, where the fire occurred, and Aquinas – will now be equipped with sprinkler systems. All other residence halls will be expanded. Building codes have served as a baseline for sprinkler systems. The University will now be exceeding those standards."
   - "Seton Hall's commitment has not changed since January 19. These students and their families who have been affected by the fire continue to be our first priority. Today, I want to make a simple, but important distinction. These grieving families and their attorneys are not one in the same. I am not naïve about the law and tactics used in the pursuit of justice. However, when attorneys questions our compassion, and the care and support of this community, I take umbrage."

2. In your opinion, did the University's communication of the fact that Seton Hall was not legally required to equip its dormitories with sprinklers alleviate its responsibility for the crisis?

3. In your opinion, why didn't the University shift the blame for the fire to students/visitors who may have set it?

4. In your opinion, why didn't the University deny responsibility for the crisis?

5. In your opinion, does citing a national trend for a campus crisis (ie: that false alarms are a problem at campuses throughout the nation, not just at Seton Hall) build compassion for a campus undergoing a crisis connected to that trend?

6. In your opinion, did the University noting that nearly 67% of the nation's campuses with residence halls were not fully equipped with sprinkler systems at the time of the Seton Hall crisis alleviate Seton Hall's responsibility for its crisis?

7. How do you believe each of the following actions influenced Seton Hall's image during and post crisis? Describe the nature of this influence (positive, negative, neutral, other).
   • Setting up an 800 number for information
   • Setting up the University Center as a student-only location during and after the fire
   • Immediately making counseling available and urging use of counsels
   • Arranging an evening prayer service on the night of the fire
   • Holding a memorial service
   • Partnering with Lipman Hearne, a public relations firm, for support during and after the crisis
   • Erecting a memorial bell tower
   • Establishing a scholarship fund
   • Installing sprinklers in all dormitory buildings
   • Developing a memorial garden outside of Boland Hall

8. In your opinion, what vehicles of communication (ie: University web site, University phone calls, reports from friends and family, media reports) positively influenced Seton Hall's image during and after the crisis?

9. In your opinion, what vehicles of communication (ie: University web site, University phone calls, reports from friends and family, media reports) negatively influenced Seton Hall's image during and after the crisis?

10. How would you characterize media reports during Seton Hall's response to the fire?

11. How did the installation of sprinklers contribute to your feelings about the Seton Hall post crisis?

12. In your opinion, how should a university honor/remember those affected by a crisis on campus?

13. What effect did the Seton Hall memorials of fire victims have on your view of the university post-crisis?

14. Do you perceive long-term remembrances of the fire as necessary for Seton Hall? Why?

15. What is your perception of Seton Hall University's image pre-crisis?

16. What is your perception of Seton Hall University image post-crisis?

17. What do you believe was the goal of Seton Hall University's crisis communication plan at the time of the fire?