



**Feb 11, 2019 Campus Incident  
Review & Recommendations**

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**March 13, 2019**



**Public Safety Consultants LLC**

## The Incident

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On February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019, at 5:47pm, the University of North Florida Police Department Communications Center received a *single* 9-1-1 call reporting a man with a rifle in UNF Building 38 (Arena Garage).

All available members of the University Police Department (UPD) were immediately dispatched and began arriving at the garage in 1 minute 38 seconds. Many of the officers were armed with patrol rifles and wore ballistic vests.

Law Enforcement command on scene requested the UPD Communications Center craft and send a warning notification message. At 6:11pm UNF PD Communications Center transmitted an email message via Blackboard Connect which read: "UPD is responding to a possible armed individual in garage building 38. Leave the area if safe to do so. Find a safe area and shelter in place. Officers have blocked building 38 until further notice. Do not attempt to enter or leave garage 38 next to the arena." Blackboard Connect is the University's notification system which is capable of sending messages via phone, text or email. The message sent by UNF PD Communications via Blackboard Connect was mistakenly sent only to email recipients when the wrong method of transmission was selected in the messaging software by a Police Communications Officer (PCO).

Social Media posts began to appear regarding the incident including photos and live videos of law enforcement operations surrounding the Arena garage. Many of these posts began questioning why no alert messages had been sent, and why the campus was unaware of what was prompting law enforcement activity.

At 6:30pm, while enroute to campus, VP Ashton became aware that not all of her staff had received the initial notification message sent at 6:11pm. After conferring with Chief Mackesy, who was also enroute to the campus, VP Ashton instructed her staff to send the notification message in all ways UNF communicates.

At 6:41 VP Shuman advised VP Ashton classes had been cancelled for the rest of the day and VP Ashton advised her staff to add the class cancellation to the notification.

At 6:45pm Chief Mackesy and VP Shuman arrived on scene and assumed roles as joint incident commanders. Chief Mackesy was the Public Safety Incident Commander and VP Shuman was the UNF

Incident Commander. The two worked as a unified incident command per the UNF Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan. Due to the size and containment of the incident, the UNF incident management team was appropriately not expanded to include other members, with the exception of VP Ashton who assumed the Public Information Officer Role.

At 6:57pm UNF Public Information successfully transmitted email, text and voice notification messages via Blackboard Connect which read “UPD is responding to a possible armed individual in arena garage building 38. Leave the area if safe to do so. Find a safe area and shelter in place. Officers have blocked building 38 until further notice. Do not attempt to enter or leave garage 38 next to the arena. Classes are cancelled for the rest of the day.”

At 7:01pm UNF Public Information successfully sent a message to all users in all possible ways via the UNF Alert system. The UNF Alert system has the ability to send/post to Canvas emails, UNF website homepage, UNF myWings, SafeOspreys, Facebook and Twitter.

At 7:19pm Law Enforcement advised Chief Mackesy the fourth and final search of the garage had been concluded, including a visual inspection of every vehicle in the garage, with no suspect located.

7:22pm the UNF Incident Commander approved language of an “all clear” message. Chief Mackesy advised UNF PD Communications to issue an “All Clear” message to the campus. This message was sent at 7:30pm via text and voice message. The message read “UPD has concluded their search of the parking garage and it has been rendered safe. If you have sheltered in place anywhere on campus – you are now free to leave. Classes remain cancelled for tonight and will resume their normal schedule tomorrow.”

At 7:30pm UNF Public Information successfully sent the “All Clear” message through the UNF Alert system.

## Contributing factors

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### Positive factors:

- The call was dispatched by UPD Communications to all available police officers by radio and acknowledged within 20 seconds. UPD officers, many armed with patrol rifles and wearing ballistic vests, began arriving at building 38 within 1 minute 38 seconds.
- The first UPD supervisor on scene assumed command and organized officers into teams to search building 38 and prevent anyone from entering the garage.
- The FBI has reported “the average active-shooter incident lasts 12 minutes. 37% last less than 5 minutes”. With these incident metrics in mind, the ability to have well trained University Police officers located on a relatively compact campus who can execute such a rapid response is invaluable.
- An intelligence operation was conducted by UPD detectives at their headquarters where the complainant was identified and taken into custody in downtown Jacksonville, by the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office for an involuntary mental health evaluation. The entire intelligence operation was completed within 2 hours 30 minutes from the initial call.
- UNF policy dictates the use of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). University administrative staff have been trained in the NIMS incident command system (ICS) and exercise their training on a regular basis. The concept that 2 command structures will need to be established has been included in all UNF administrative staff training. One is the public safety command structure and the second is the UNF administrative command structure. The public safety command structure manages all Law Enforcement, Fire and Rescue operations and resources required by their mission. The UNF incident management team handles all non-public safety issues regarding the campus community, campus facilities and logistical tasks that may be required to support the public safety efforts. In the case of the February 11<sup>th</sup> incident, this was a small contained incident that did not require activation of entire incident management teams. Incident command is scalable, and this incident called for an incident commander for public safety, an incident commander for the University and a public

information officer for the University. The 2 incident commanders met in a secure location near the incident and managed it accordingly.

- Without UNF experiencing injury or loss of life, this incident provided a good learning experience and an opportunity to address issues that could occur during any critical incident.

#### Opportunities for Improvement:

- The message sent by UNF PD Communications via Blackboard Connect was mistakenly sent only to email recipients. The PCO selected a choice on the screen entitled “select all” believing he had selected all choices of how the message would be transmitted. In reality, “select all” pertained to the possible list of recipients only, and not the method of communication to be used in transmitting the message. The email selection was already stored on the screen and the PCO did not add text and phone to the message transmission types. The Blackboard Connect system, while useful for student registrations and other items on campus, did not perform well in this instance for UNF’s public safety emergency communications via email. Sending out this message required the PCO to perform 14 steps, and we have determined Blackboard Connect, in the current configuration, did not succeed in sending a large number of emails during this event. Also, more pre-determined messages need to be stored for use in the system to eliminate command decisions made quickly while under pressure from an unfolding incident, and lack of understanding at the communications center regarding the proper message to be transmitted.
- In this instance, use of the indoor and outdoor public address systems was not appropriate as the incident occurred in a small contained area of the campus and was not a verified event. When necessary, the procedure involves issuing a notification over the indoor fire-alarm speakers in the Simplex system and separately in the Cooper outdoor speaker system. Presently, the PCO must leave their console position, walk across the communications center, decide which location the message is to be routed to and finally read the message into a hand held microphone for each system. These 2 notification system consoles are located on separate walls in the communications center. Once again, there are multiple points of failure that can occur when completing this part of the process.

- The communications center is understaffed, and the turnover rate is too high.
  - First, having a single dispatcher on a shift in the communications center is a practice that should not be continued. The minimum staffing in the communications center should be 2. During the February 11<sup>th</sup> incident, 306 calls were received at the UNF PD communications center. This is in addition to ongoing radio transmissions and notifications being requested.
  - Second, the turnover rate in the communications center staff is too high. This can be attributed to salaries significantly below what communications officers receive in similar jobs in the immediate area. The State of Florida requires communications officers to complete 260 hours of training and pass a State exam to hold these positions. UPD is authorized and qualified to conduct this training. Therefore, UPD is acting as a training academy for telecommunications officers who gain this certification, gain a few months of experience and move on to other higher paying positions in the area.
- Communications officers need to have quick and easily accessed procedures to follow during incidents they infrequently handle. While these procedures have long been in effect at UNF PD, guide-cards will provide easily accessible procedures individualized to each call type the communications center may receive. These guide-cards are available both in electronic format and on laminated cards that can be easily accessed during a computer failure.
- During the incident, calls were received at UNF PD Communications from faculty seeking information on what procedures they should be following. The “Active-Shooter” training being required of all UNF employees does not currently apply to faculty.

## Recommendations

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- Increase Communications Center staffing to provide for a minimum of 2 PCO's on duty at all times.
- Reduce turnover rate and increase longevity rates through salary increases to close the gap being paid in UNF's area for similar positions with similar duties.
- Review the use of Blackboard Connect in the UNF Police Communications Center versus a system designed for rapid and error free public safety alerting. The system should reduce possible points of failure in the alerting process and provide for automated synthesized voice alerts for audible warning systems.
- Create messages covering possible needs for high profile and critical incidents. Emergency warning messages to be sent by Police Communications Officers need to be carefully crafted in advance by management with methods of transmission set by policy. The same warning system should be remotely available to UNF Public Information Officers who can send follow-up messages when they become available to do so. Insure messages sent during high profile and critical incidents are pre-approved by incident commanders. The University policy regarding emergency notifications should be reviewed.
- Provide the Communications Center with both laminated and electronic guide cards to quickly access procedures per existing UPD policy.
- Require "Active-Shooter" training for all employees including faculty.
- Monitor implementation of recommendations to ensure expectations stay realistic and attainable.
- Take advantage of lessons learned during this incident, which was without serious consequences, to develop systems and procedures to mitigate issues that occurred in this instance.