

# Is Paris Burning?

## Information management at a time of risk or crisis<sup>1</sup>

Detailed information and knowledge are the best tools for managing both risk and fear.

### A. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Before a crisis outbreak, identify reliable, non-commercial sources of news and information, in both French and English. Include on-line sources, TV, print journalism. Establish a master list.

*Some suggested French sources:* Le Monde (lemonde.fr); Libération (liberation.fr); Rue89 (rue89.com); i-Télé (itele.fr); Mediapart (mediapart.fr - has English version, paid site but inexpensive and no commitment necessary)

*Some suggested English-language sources:* France 24 (france24.com); BBC (bbc.co.uk); The Guardian International (theguardian.com/international); Al Jazeera (<http://www.aljazeera.com/>).

This list will be varied and will have varied and different uses throughout a period of crisis and after.

Monitor official sources: government ministries (e.g. the Facebook page of the Ministry of the Interior - <https://www.facebook.com/ministere.interieur/>) and the US Embassy and State Department.

Identify and use a second set of sources to become aware of what US residents are seeing and hearing: cable news, The New York Times, Washington Post, and the like.

At the time of crisis, local experts and specialists, and people close to the situation should be identified and called upon for additional non-sensationalist insight into not only events but on-the-ground conditions after the event at several points on the time-line (immediate, day after, several days after...) Program leadership can establish their own eyewitness in visiting sites and districts cited in the mainstream news. This can be a valuable counterpoint to the major media coverage with its imperative to construct and frame stories.

Prior to crisis, programs can insist that all students have a local cellphone number. Students can be briefed to send text messages or tweets to certain numbers or accounts at the outbreak of a crisis, concerning their whereabouts and safety (*see dedicated factsheet in the toolbox*).

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## **B. USES OF INFORMATION**

(suggested protocols of communication at a [time of crisis](#))

1. Begin the process of contacting all students.
2. Notify home institutions immediately that that process is underway. Request that they transmit any information received concerning students in one's program(s).
3. Notify home institutions as news from students arrives.
4. Begin immediately monitoring the situation, news bulletins, sources on the ground, etc.
5. Begin drafting messages for various constituencies:

**1 - Students:** provide information about other students' safety; transmit what is know of the situation as well as any public safety requirements or orders (e.g. curfew); request testimony from any students present near the crisis; issue requirements/guidelines for student action and behavior; announce drop-in or call-in availability of staff members for students (observing any public safety restrictions on movements); provide links to reliable news sources; provide short text for parents and charge students with responsibility for communicating it to their parents along with what they are observing, and hearing in local media; stress the importance of knowledge in assessing risk and reducing fear.

**2 - Home institutions:** provide SAOs and risk managers with texts of all messages to students, and with text destined for parents as provided to students; suggest links to reliable English-language sources of information; begin immediately providing information and views they likely do not have access to, including when necessary correcting poor information in international media; discuss security concerns and measures taken or possibly to be taken; discuss effects of events on continued safe and effective operation of the program(s), offer to speak with parents needing reassurance.

**3. Parents:** provide links to reliable English-language sources; alert parents to risk of misinformation via cable news and negative effects of same stories repeated in a loop (tune in but don't forget to turn off afterwards); provide realistic assessments of the situation and of risk levels; provide news and updates on student safety, movements, and morale, for their child *and* in general; make it clear that the program is in constant touch with home university. Determine parent communication policy: through home institution, messages on website and social media, through students, direct email, or direct email and phone upon request, etc.



## **C. IN GENERAL**

Provide maps. Put distances and proximities in perspective. Perform "zoom-in" to counteract media "zoom-out".

Be proactive, ahead of things, confident and professional. Avoid at all times a defensive stance.

Communicate a lot to all constituencies.

Establish a section of home page of program website for communiqués, interviews, background views and commentary. Keep in mind that the goal is not breaking news but supplements and correctives to major media to help your constituencies form accurate impressions and make informed decisions.

Be vigilant as to what is circulating on social media. Legends, exaggerations and falsehoods abound, including some items picked up by some journalists.

Continue to communicate throughout and beyond the crisis. Less news and more analysis. Record students reactions and views. Get your constituents in the habit of going to your homepage or social media site for information etc.

Divide your crisis information program into three cycles:

- 1.** immediate, real-time progress reports on student location and wellbeing, and assessing the overall breaking situation
- 2.** what is and what is not going on - updates on events, safety, risk, morale and monitoring major media coverage
- 3.** continued coverage, and discussion, debriefing students, student morale, prospects for the program and its host city.

During cycles two and three, propose to students teach-ins, debates, informal get-togethers, for sharing information and views, distinct from offers of psychological help (though it may serve same purpose!).

## **AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION:**

Outside of crisis periods stay informed on what's going on in French society, Europe and the world, using the same source guidelines as above. An actor not an island. Also, get informed on how major US media see France and Europe.

Finally, stay attuned to US intellectual discourse on campus concerning French and European society, including exaggerations, idées reçues, and reflections of US own preoccupations.