Chapter 8

One Plan, Four Libraries: A Case Study in Disaster Planning for a Four-Campus Academic Institution

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ABSTRACT

The University of North Georgia, a recently consolidated university, has four libraries of varying sizes with different types of collections—ranging from libraries with larger sized book collections to libraries that rely on electronic resources. In addition to the differences in size and collections, the libraries also face the challenge of distance. This chapter follows the creation of an emergency plan, a recovery plan, and a continuity of operations plan for an academic library with four unique campus locations. The creation process begins with risk assessments of all four libraries, creating a team to write the plan, writing the plan and implementation and training for faculty and staff. The policies were written by a committee of five and included at least one representative from each campus.

INTRODUCTION

The University of North Georgia was formed after the consolidation of Gainesville State College and North Georgia College and State University. The libraries for the now four-campus institution began consolidating policies, including the creation of a new emergency plan that covered all four libraries. This chapter reviews the history of the University of North Georgia and relevant literature before exploring the creation and implementation of the libraries’ disaster plan. The explanation of the process is divided into four areas: risk assessment, building the team, writing the plan, and implementation and training. The first two sections—risk assessment and building the team—have been completed. The other two portions of the section are ongoing and proposed, respectively. Following the description of the steps taken to create the plan, the issues encountered by the committee and the solutions used to resolve the problems are explored.

BACKGROUND

In 2012 the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia announced that Gainesville
State College and North Georgia College and State University would consolidate to form the University of North Georgia (University of North Georgia, 2015). Gainesville State College, founded in 1964, was a two-year institution with two campuses (Gainesville and Oconee County). The school was originally a junior college and over the course of its almost 50 years, began adding four-year degrees (University of North Georgia, 2015). North Georgia College and State University was founded in 1873 as an agricultural college with a military component – the Corps of Cadets. North Georgia College and State University was a single campus institution (University System of Georgia, 2015). Prior to the announcement of consolidation, the two institutions united to build a small campus in Cumming, Georgia that would serve both student populations (Williams, 2011).

The consolidation officially took place in January 2013 with the fall semester of 2014 being the first semester of classes in the newly formed university (University of North Georgia, 2015). The result of the consolidation was a single university with four campuses that span four counties in Northeast Georgia. Each of the four campuses has a library, two of which libraries containing archival/special collections materials.

Over the course of the first year of consolidation the libraries worked to merge existing policies and create new policies as necessary. Along with merging borrowing policies, visitor and community privileges, and food and drink policies, the libraries and the university as a whole needed a new emergency plan. Each of the prior institutions had a university-wide emergency plan, however, neither had an up-to-date plan specifically for the library.

While it is not unusual for a single institution to have multiple libraries, the University of North Georgia presents some unique challenges. Location is one challenge: the two larger campuses, Dahlonega and Gainesville, are approximately 30 miles apart, while the Oconee campus, the farthest of the four campuses, is approximately 41 miles south of Gainesville and almost 70 miles south of Dahlonega. The distance between campuses (varying from 20-70 miles) means different contacts for emergencies. It also means that each campus has very distinctive risks. The weather patterns at Dahlonega, for example, are quite different from those at Oconee. Each building also presents unique challenges due to their design and the fact that three of the four libraries share the building with other departments. Other challenges include the types of materials collected in each location and the number of staff members at each location. With the differences in locations, the question becomes can a single emergency plan cover all four libraries with minor adjustments such as contact numbers for emergency personnel and risk assessments, or should each location have a unique plan created specifically for the location?

When this process began, I and many of the others involved had limited experience with disaster planning. To prepare, I began researching disaster planning from the perspective of writing a plan. It was surprising that I had more success finding publications on cleaning up after the disaster than on how to write a plan to prepare for emergencies. In my research, I also noticed that many of the results for my searches were books or articles that dated from the mid-1980s through the early 1990s. Though many aspects of disaster planning remain the same, the changes in technology over the years has vastly changed as have some of the requirements and procedures for getting federal and state support after the disaster. I depended on a book from the “How-to-do-it manuals for librarians” series published by Neal Schuman Publishers, another book by Julie Todaro, and the independent study courses provided by FEMA. I relied most heavily on Disaster Planning: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians by Deborah D. Halsted, Richard P. Jasper, and Felicia P. Little. This book covered everything from types of disaster, to assessing your library’s risks to templates for plans. The book also provided a suggested list of supplies to have on hand in case of emergency.