



Office of the Chancellor

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Executive Summary of External After-Action Review

Background

On Tuesday, April 30, 2019, at approximately 5:39 p.m., a former student at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte) entered classroom 236 in the Kennedy Building on the UNC Charlotte main campus and began shooting. The shooter fatally injured two students and wounded four others before being tackled by one of the students who later died at the scene.

Two days after the incident, Chancellor Philip Dubois announced that he would commission an external after-action review (AAR) to constructively evaluate the response to the incident and identify opportunities to improve UNC Charlotte's policies, procedures, and practices regarding critical incident responses. The National Police Foundation (NPF) and International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA) were subsequently selected to conduct the AAR.

On June 15, the final AAR was provided to Chancellor Dubois. Though the full text of the AAR is considered confidential, Chancellor Dubois determined that its findings and recommendations should be summarized to provide transparency regarding the university's response to the events of April 30, 2019; share lessons learned so that other organizations can strengthen their critical incident policies, practices, and procedures; and inform the UNC Charlotte community of the actions and changes the university intends to implement to address the findings and recommendations of the AAR.

Methodology and Scope

To conduct the AAR, the NPF and IACLEA assembled a team of subject matter experts with extensive experience in university administration; academic and student affairs; and campus emergency management, communications, threat assessment, behavioral health, and critical incident response. From September 2019 to February 2020, the assessment team:

- Conducted interviews and focus groups with more than 115 UNC Charlotte senior administration officials, faculty, staff, and students, as well as interviews with family members, law enforcement and emergency management first responders, and personnel from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) and Charlotte Fire Department (CFD), the Mecklenburg County's District Attorney's Office, and the Mecklenburg County Public Defender's Office;

- Reviewed materials including audio and external video from the incident, UNC Charlotte policies and procedures, internal after-action assessments, and other related reports;
- Examined publicly available media related to the incident;
- Researched national standards, model policies, and promising practices; and
- Studied after-action reports from previous school shootings and critical incidents.

Based on their analysis of this information, the NPF and IACLEA assessment team developed specific recommendations related to four areas of the university's response: (a) Leadership, Relationships, and Preparedness; (b) Crisis Communication; (c) Threat Assessment; and (d) Mental Health, Resilience, and Recovery.

Key Themes

A number of key themes emerged throughout the AAR, including:

- There was no information that UNC Charlotte could have obtained prior to the incident that would have enabled it to identify the shooter as a potential threat.
- The initial law enforcement response to the classroom and arrest of the perpetrator was fast and effective, with the first UNC Charlotte PPS officers arriving on scene within four minutes of the shooting (the average police response to a school shooting is approximately 10 minutes). The shooter, who was still in the classroom, was arrested within minutes of their arrival.
- First responders rendered aid, secured the scene, and handled the shooter in a professional manner consistent with law enforcement best practices.
- Campus leadership quickly responded to secure the campus (including by initiating a campus-wide lockdown), communicate with the campus community, and prepare for other ongoing campus needs.
- Following the shooter's arrest and during UNC Charlotte's efforts to secure the campus, two challenges surfaced that impacted the university's response.
 - First, though implementation of the campus-wide lockdown was appropriate, there were no articulated parameters for declaring the campus safe or ending the lockdown.
 - Second, command and control of the response was transferred from UNC Charlotte Police and Public Safety (PPS) to CMPD without advance coordination of certain decisions.

- As a result of the prolonged campus-wide lockdown and lack of unified command, inconsistent directions were provided to students and staff who were released as buildings were cleared, and coordination of student transport to the family reunification center and the dissemination of information was limited.
- UNC Charlotte requires additional mutual aid agreements (MUAs) with local emergency response agencies, and more detailed delineation of roles and responsibilities in its existing MUAs. Further, UNC Charlotte personnel had limited training with their mutual aid counterparts prior to the incident. Even so, local agencies responded heroically to support PPS on April 30, 2019, and provided invaluable assistance during the incident. As Chief Jeff Baker noted at the press conference held following the incident, “[T]here isn’t one agency who didn’t respond to our needs on campus.”
- During the incident, some UNC Charlotte staff members did not fully understand or execute their expected roles and responsibilities in an active shooter situation, while others were overburdened by multiple roles. Clearly defining and assigning roles and responsibilities will enhance the effectiveness and efficiencies of important emergency response operations and processes.
- Campus leadership played an integral role in setting the overall tone for the recovery and building resilience. UNC Charlotte officials placed an emphasis on learning from the incident and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of UNC Charlotte community. UNC Charlotte’s efforts to plan and execute messaging around the incident, related memorials, and anniversaries, and to provide counseling services to the UNC Charlotte community, were commended by the assessment team.
- UNC Charlotte made extensive mental health support to students, faculty, and staff, both on- and off-campus. Its efforts have been recognized by students, parents, faculty, and staff, and have contributed to a stronger, more resilient campus. Continuing to plan for and provide mental health services and resources to UNC Charlotte students, faculty, and staff is vital in supporting the long-term wellbeing of the university community.
- UNC Charlotte has developed and maintains a culture of learning to continually improve the organization. Based on the AAR and its own internal review and reflection processes, UNC Charlotte has made and continues to make updates to its public safety planning and preparedness.

Key Recommendations

Based on its findings, the assessment team made a number of specific recommendations, which are summarized broadly below:

- a. Leadership, Relationships, and Preparedness
 - UNC Charlotte has promoted a culture of learning that encourages identification and addressing of issues related to the April 30, 2019 incident, and should continue to build on that culture following the AAR process.

- Additional procedures and training opportunities should be developed to ensure UNC Charlotte employees are aware of and practiced in their roles and responsibilities in an active shooter situation.
- UNC Charlotte should work with local emergency response agencies to develop detailed MUAs, and conduct regular joint training exercises to ensure effective and efficient coordination and communication in emergency situations.
- UNC Charlotte should develop additional policies and processes to minimize the extent and impact of campus-wide lockdowns.
- UNC Charlotte should continue to make ALICE active shooter training available to all university faculty, staff, and students, and consider additionally offering basic psychological first aid training.

b. Crisis Communication

- While the university's communication during and after the incident was effective, opportunity exists for further clarifying communication roles and responsibilities in a crisis, and for developing backup plans for situations in which communicators are not immediately available.

c. Threat Assessment

- Though not a factor on April 30, given the current size and continued growth of the university, UNC Charlotte would benefit from additional staff dedicated to identifying, assessing, and managing campus behavioral and threat related concerns.
- UNC Charlotte should review and update its protocols, tools, standard operating procedures, and training related to threat assessment, and expand training opportunities to include additional employees.

d. Mental Health, Resilience, and Recovery

- While the messaging and support services provided by UNC Charlotte since the incident have been laudable and positively received, the university should begin transitioning to a long-term plan for supporting victims, families, witnesses, first responders, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Many employees continue to exhibit trauma from the incident, and others involved in the response to the incident have not taken the time they needed to sufficiently care for their own mental health and wellness. UNC Charlotte should consider providing long-term on-campus mental health services and resources for faculty and staff to supplement its existing Employee Assistance Program.

Moving Forward: Decisions by the Chancellor

The AAR produced 31 findings and 79 specific recommendations for consideration by UNC Charlotte. As acknowledged in the AAR, many of the recommendations had already been addressed by UNC Charlotte staff as a result of the campus' own after-action review shortly after the April 30 shootings in 2019. With respect to the remaining recommendations, Chancellor Dubois has directed attention to each of them by responsible UNC Charlotte staff. However, the vast majority of the recommendations to be addressed as a result of the following actions initiated by Chancellor Dubois:

1. A review and revision of the University's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and the configuration and location of its Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in light of the AAR findings, with particular attention to the development of specific procedures to govern the lifting of a campus lockdown order.
2. A review and revision of the University's Crisis Communications Plan in light of the AAR findings, with particular attention needed with respect to the specification of staff roles and responsibilities and coordination of public communications with any external agencies involved in responding to a campus emergency.
3. A review of the University's training programs for dealing with campus emergencies, particularly those necessary for the on-boarding of any new senior administrators, and continuing attention to active shooter training for faculty, staff, and students.
4. Additional research related to the AAR recommendations with respect to the University's threat assessment methods and processes. Although the AAR acknowledged that the University had no information prior to the incident that would have enabled it to identify the shooter as a potential threat, the AAR makes specific suggestions for strengthening the ability of the University to identify, assess, and manage campus behavioral and threat-related concerns.
5. A recommendation to Chancellor-elect Gaber that she begin a senior-level dialogue with respect to the development of a community resilience plan as the second anniversary of the shootings approaches in 2021, with particular attention to supporting the ongoing mental health services needed to address the psychological trauma experienced by many members of the campus community as a result of the shootings and the lockdown.