MARIETTA COLLEGE: SURVIVING A NATURAL DISASTER.

A Thesis
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ABSTRACT

There is a lack of research on how a college campus may be affected by negative national media exposure. With increasing media hunger for sensational stories, colleges are facing national attention for its handling of campus crisis. Once the media has moved on to its next media event, the college is left to manage the lingering effects of how the campus and public has reacted to the campus crisis. There is a need to understand the state of the campus after its attempt to return to normal. The researcher has conducted a grounded theory qualitative research study to explore the effects of a crisis that made national news. Surveys were distributed to a campus community, seeking reactions to a crisis that occurred over two years ago. This study will not, as most studies prefer, study the crisis and then analyze decisions that were made during that time. Rather, the focus will be to discover how the campus’ perception has been effected. This is an alternative approach to traditional research, considering the participant’s point of view.
Dedicated to my FAMILY

First, to my wife and best friend, Ellen, who offered just the right amount of motivation and space at the appropriate times. Without you, this would not be occurring, and for all of the above, I Thank You dearly.

To my two sons, Nathan and Lucas, who allowed dad some quiet time, even though the office is directly under the living room. I can only hope that I have set a good example for all the hours you witnessed dad doing his “homework”.

To my parents and in-laws for the evenings you have been willing to let your grandsons stay with you. And, to my Mother, who has repeatedly said how proud she is of this accomplishment.

To my family, I say, “I am proud of you!”
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

With increasing media hunger for sensational stories, colleges are facing national attention for its handling of campus emergencies. For instance, Larson (1994) stated that our institutions have become front-page news for crisis management. Stories ranging from crime, racism, sexual harassment, computer hacking, hazardous waste spills to what the curriculum should look like are grounds for media exposure. In 1989, President Bush signed into law the “Student-Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act”, which requires colleges and universities to make available to students, employees, and applicants an annual report on security policies and campus crime statistics (Legislative Update, 1991). The ease of the use of the internet, sensationalism stories regarding colleges and universities, social trends and laws all work together to encourage campus crises to make national or global news.

Colleges are constantly seeking media avenues to project positive images of their campus, such as recognizing merit accomplishments, athletic success, fine art trips abroad, and students volunteering within the community. These are all examples of positive reasons to be in the news. Its livelihood through recruitment can be a direct result of the public’s present perception of the institution. Unfortunately, national media attention may appear at a time of disaster. Smith (1997) defines crisis as a “critical situation that creates an emotional impact on those involved and has the potential to change a person’s life.” He further states, “It is not the situation itself, but how people feel and react to it or the psychological reaction to the threat that makes it a crisis. An
overwhelming intensity of emotions (fear, anger, sadness) overwhelm victims and interfere with the ability to think clearly and make sound decisions.” The “awe factor” coverage of disaster, tragedy, and disbelief is what draws the media.

*Marietta College and Community Flood (2004)*

From the middle of the college campus’ main pedestrian area. (http://www.marietta.edu/~osborne/Flood-04.html)

Taken from a freshmen residence hall. Note, the college’s football stadium on the left. The crossbar was almost under water. (http://www.marietta.edu/~osborne/Flood-04.html)

A residence hall for upper-classmen. The students’ gathering place is across the street. (http://www.marietta.edu/~osborne/Flood-04.html)
A well-known tourist attraction for unique shopping, outdoor eateries, and evening entertainment.
(http://www.marietta.edu/~osbornee/Flood-04.html)

Note the dumpster floating down the street.
(http://outdoors.webshots.com/album/109675107xDDeZU)

Popular tourist attraction.
(http://www.marietta.edu/~osbornee/Flood-04.html)
Statement of the Problem

An area of evaluating a campus crisis that has received little attention is how a campus has progressed beyond an incident. There are many articles offering overviews of campus emergencies. There are ample articles offering guidelines on “how to respond to a campus crisis.” For instance, (Young, et al, 2002), is an article that evaluates campus emergencies from a series of incidents during the 2000-2001 academic year. (Carter 2000) provides an overview of recent campus emergencies. (Larson 1994) and (Smith 1997) are suggested guidelines to follow during a campus crisis. The majority of information available only address the emergency and the strategy of handling the crisis.

A need exists to evaluate the campus crisis once the national spotlight has diminished, and moved on to its next tragic calling. We need to better understand the campus after it has returned to normal. It is important to understand how the college has changed (or not), as a result of having to deal with a negative event.

Purpose Statement

The Chinese symbol for crisis means danger and opportunity. It is the opportunity aspect that receives little attention. The purpose of my qualitative study was to explore how a campus community was affected by a national media disaster and as a result if current campus life and college perception were altered in reaction to its crisis that occurred over two years ago.
Research Questions

This grounded theory study specifically explored emotions, campus life, campus operations, and public image as it exists today. The campus was asked to respond to the current perception of the college and if there are changes that have occurred since the crisis. This study did not, as most studies prefer, research the crisis and then analyze decisions that were made during that time. The emphasis was on the changes in perception since the crisis occurred. The study asked the following exploratory questions: Has campus life changed? What themes have emerged as a result of this incident? Has the college’s public perception been affected? Are there still questions or concerns about the event that occurred over two years ago?

Limitations

This study was limited by the size of the population to be surveyed. Noting that at the time of conducting this research, the juniors and seniors have since graduated and are not included in this study.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There has been little research that explored how a nationally publicized crisis may impact normal operations of a college campus. While the media will not hesitate to air the tragedy, rarely, will the media revisit to nationally publicize the impact of their negative coverage, or the ability of the victims to overcome the event. Most studies focus on prevention or short-term response to the crisis. The researcher conducted a literature review to introduce the main components of this national media crisis.

The Community

The state of Ohio is home to the Northwest Territory’s first settlement. Welcoming citizens, brick and tree-lined streets help describe the community of 15,000, nestled between two rivers in Southeast Ohio. Tourism is a major economic component to its livelihood. “Before railroads or highways or airports, it was the water of the Muskingum River that connected the communities of southeast Ohio with each other and the rest of the world (Hrach, 2008).”

According to Travel Magazine, “Since 1825, this charming river town has been rolling out the welcome mat for visitors. With its outstanding museums, river cruises, and historical attractions, it’s easy to understand why it is such a popular Midwest destination for travelers.” Ohio Magazine states, “The creative spirit in Marietta extends from local artists’ work found in the local galleries on Front Street to the refurbishing of century-old buildings into viable storefronts for local business owners. Where other towns might tear down and build new, Marietta residents preserve and restore, making for a picture-perfect slice of America along its downtown streets.” As found in an article, “Marietta’s
downtown is a source of local pride. While many Midwest towns suffer from blight in their town centers, Marietta retains a vibrant, historic downtown. Numerous antique stores, restaurants, coffee shops, candy shops, craft stores, boutiques, spas, a brewery, and a riverboat-era hotel populate the preserved downtown. Part of the old trolley track is still intact and visible at the town’s central intersection (www.fieldsdehmlow.com).”

The College

The community of Marietta is home to one of the oldest colleges in the nation. Marietta College is one of America’s 37 Revolutionary Colleges, institutions with origins reaching back to the 18th century. In 1860, Marietta became the sixteenth college awarded a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the world’s oldest honorary society. Marietta is constantly named one of the top private colleges in the Midwest by US News and World Report’s annual index of America’s Best Colleges (most recently as a “Top-15” school in the Midwest). The college is also listed in Peterson’s Best Buys in Higher Education, the Princeton Review’s 150 Best Colleges in the Midwest, and the Templeton Foundation Guide to Character Building Colleges (Quickfacts).

The college is fortunate to have such a high percentage of geographic diversity among its 1,350 undergraduates. There are 44 states and 15 countries represented at this private liberal arts college. It is a competitive market for recruiting quality students. Two years ago, a college official stated, “There is a real plus here. It’s a beautiful and clean campus, prestigious academic history, modern facilities, caring faculty, and a warm and friendly community to welcome prospective families when they visit. Once a prospective family experiences Marietta, the college usually becomes one of their top choices.

Recruiting quality students to campus is very competitive. Any one variable can alter,
positively or negatively, our enrollment by multiple percentage points. The Marietta community is an integral influence on our enrollment efforts.” An excerpt from a college publication encourages families to visit, “…along with your campus visit, walk our red brick streets and stop in our quaint shops and museums. Stroll through Indian burial mounds, or picnic by the river in Muskingum Park.” At the time of conducting the research, total direct cost to attend Marietta College was $33,500 per academic year.

The Community/College Relationship

There is a vested interest for both to succeed. Marietta College provides a huge economic boost to the local economy. Employment opportunities, money spent in local businesses by campus expenditures, students, visiting families, athletic teams, and on-campus events all contribute to the community’s livelihood. In a study, it was reported that the college was the fifth largest employer in Marietta and provided 19.4 million dollars into the economy (Delemeester, Kumiko 1996). That figure converts to 25.6 million in current dollar value (www.measuringworth.com). To further strengthen the community and campus relationship, the mayor and many area professionals are Marietta College graduates.

Marietta College relies on the community’s presence as a positive factor when prospective families visit its campus, often spending the entire day, or overnight, getting a sense of the campus and the surrounding community. Whether visiting on campus or downtown, students are considering if they want to take a four-year undergraduate journey and parents are deciding if it would be a quality atmosphere for their son or daughter to attend Marietta College. After each official campus visit, the admission office asks for a survey to be completed (Appendix D). The following is a sampling of
comments received, “the campus was beautiful, one of the cleanest colleges we have visited, the merchants were very friendly, a quaint colonial college town, a peaceful atmosphere, a caring feeling by faculty, friendly students, lots of smiling faces, gorgeous….absolutely a gorgeous community, a hidden gem, made to feel welcome on campus and downtown, very pretty.”

It is the strong presence of this intertwined relationship between a small liberal art college, surrounded by a quaint colonial town, that plays an integral factor of attracting students’ and parents’ interest in seeking admission. As one family responded, “we were made to feel secure and confident that our son will be in a positive atmosphere, on and off campus.”

_Floods and Marietta_

This colonial college town has learned to embrace the rivers flowing beside and through its town. As the original thirteen colonies of the New America looked to expand West, Marietta, because of its rivers, became known as “the Gateway West of the Ohio River”. There are no levees. As a long-term resident stated, “When you live by a river, sometimes it floods. We have two rivers (Marietta Times, January 6, 2008).” In the same article, the former manager of the Campus Martius and Ohio River Museums states, “We have chosen to keep our connection with the rivers, rather than build a flood wall to separate us from them. As our forefathers did, we have chosen to rise above the floodwaters and keep our scenic vistas. We will continue to use our rivers for industry, utilities, commerce and recreation….We can afford to do no less. The rivers are still a vital part of our lives.”
The Crisis

On September 16th, 2004, Hurricane Ivan made landfall on the U.S. mainland, along the Gulf Shores, as a Category 3 hurricane. Two days later, Ivan lost tropical characteristics while crossing Virginia. The remnant low drifted off the mid-Atlantic coast, and the low pressure disturbance continued to dump rain on the United States (Finney, 2004). On September 17th, 2004, at 8:30 p.m., the Ohio Emergency Management Agency issued to the Governor, a situation report. Major flooding was predicted for southeast Ohio (Ohio Department of Health, 2007). Marietta sits at the confluence of the Ohio and Muskingum rivers, in southeast Ohio. Both were flooding.

Earlier in the day, the flood warning had been lifted. The Marietta community relaxed. However, due to miscalculations, the river continued to rise until finally on September 19th, when the waters receded, the water level had unexpectedly risen almost ten feet above flood level. The result was the worst flood in forty years and damage done to the college, local businesses, and homes (The Marcolian, September 30th, 2004). No one was prepared for this natural disaster that made national news.

The town was making headway in the September flood clean-up when in January of 2005, the rivers flooded again. This time, ice jams and winter weather combined to create another flood. “Although the water rose slower and not as high, it was still a one-two punch (Ohio Magazine).”

The Media

On September 21, 2005, the Seattle Times, in the western state of Washington, reports, “A town in Ohio brought out snowplows and fire hoses yesterday to clear the
muck away. The mayor predicted downtown businesses would be covered in up to six inches of Ohio river mud once the waters recede.”

On September 21, 2005, FOX News had allowed media time for Marietta. Part of its report included, “Water reached the top of the goal posts at the Marietta College football field, which sits near a creek, and many homes and businesses had water up to three feet deep.”

On the same day, MSNBC Headline reads, “Hurricane floods give way to filth, mud. Overflowing sewage means human waste can get in water. Snowplows help with muck.” The article further states, “Officials in the Ohio town of Marietta brought out snow plows and fire hoses to clear the muck away. Make sure you are wearing gloves when you clean up, make sure you are wearing some kind of boots, something to keep the material away from your skin.”

The number one T.V. news station in Columbus, Ohio (one of the college’s major recruiting markets), did a live remote from the heart of downtown Marietta. The reporter was standing in the middle of second street, just a hundred yards from the town’s main intersection, which includes the county courthouse. The reporter was in hip waders, and water was swirling above his knees. The camera angle revealed the reporter being surrounded by water while standing in the center of Marietta’s economic livelihood.

A storeowner was quoted in Ohio Magazine, “I can’t describe the smell. Downtown was devastated. It looked like a World War II bombing the next day…huge piles of trash in the street and on the sidewalks, destroyed merchandise, rows of those big commercial dumpsters.”
On the Marietta College campus, water was a foot high in its office for campus public safety. The football stadium had water up to the cross-bar of its goalposts, a residence hall lower floor flooded, admission office canceled one of its largest open houses of the year, and classes were canceled.

On January 14, 2005, CNN did a live report from downtown Marietta. The reporter focused on how often it floods in Marietta, and how bad the floods have been and could be. He also stated that Marietta doesn’t have to worry about a drought.

As a current or potential student, many families will be seeking the effects of what they are viewing. This is the campus community they are attending, or considering as a college to attend. Is this a place worth thirty-plus thousand dollars in tuition, room and board?

The Aftermath of a Flood

Floods can make an enormous impact on the environment, economy and society. Floods destroy drainage systems in cities, causing raw sewage to spill out into bodies of water. Also, in cases of severe floods, buildings can be significantly damaged and even destroyed. This can lead to catastrophic effects on the environment as many toxic materials such as paint, pesticide and gasoline can be released into the rivers, lakes, bays, and ocean, killing maritime life. Floods may also cause millions of dollars worth of damage to a city, both evicting people from their homes and ruining businesses. Floods cause significant amounts of erosion to coasts, leading to more frequent flooding if not repaired. (Thinkquest.com)"
“The worst effect of floods is on one’s health. Floods can cause the accumulation of human waste in the flood waters. These flood waters can spread to other areas, resulting in diseases such as cholera and malaria. (www.ssl.sabah.gov.my).”

On OHSA’s (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) website, the result of asking for the effects of a flood, reveal the following, “Flood conditions contribute to the growth and transmission of many kinds of fungi, some of which can cause sickness. Cleanup workers are at increased risk of exposure to airborne fungi and their spores because they often handle moldy building materials, decaying vegetable matter, rotting waste material, and other fungus-contaminated debris. The fungal material is carried into the respiratory tract when airborne particles are inhaled. (www.osha.gov).”

The Ohio Department of Health headline on flooding states, “Mold May Be Present in Flood-Damaged Homes. Mold can cause adverse health effects.” It further states, “When the water recedes, mold may grow in your home or business and further endanger your health.”

Summary

For families seeking the one “right” college for their son or daughter, all factors must and should be taken into consideration. Campus visits, reputation, image and word-of-mouth can persuade (or dissuade) a family’s perception of that college. Likewise, current students must make decisions on whether to return to campus, based on what they see and hear through campus communications and media, thus affecting retention rate.

After reviewing the research, it is evident that there is a lack of discovery on how a national media crisis may affect campus life and its perceived image. There is an abundance of information on negative health effects, media clips and pictures depicting
deplorable conditions, and plenty of quotes describing the misery of the current crisis being covered by the media. Once the media packs up and leaves for its next crisis, there lacks research to demonstrate the effects of how that media exposure has impacted the campus once it has returned to normal. There is a need to investigate how those who experienced this crisis feel about the current status of being a student, faculty member, or administrator at Marietta College.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes a grounded theory qualitative study that explores a campus crisis. It specifically describes design, population and sample, data collection procedures and the data analysis of the project entitled: Marietta College: Surviving a Natural Disaster, The Flood of 2004.

Study Design

To learn about the central phenomenon, the researcher prefers to allow the survey responses to develop the themes. From this data, the researcher interprets the meaning of the information drawing on personal reflections and past research. The structure of the final report is flexible, and it displays the researcher’s biases and thoughts.

“A grounded theory design is a systematic, qualitative procedure used to generate a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level, a process, an action, or interaction about a substantive topic. A theory discovered during data collection will be better than a theory identified before a study begins (Creswell 2005).” “An uncontrolled natural study where variables are not manipulated and behavior is recorded is a strong component of qualitative analysis (Bauer 2003).” This approach allows the researcher to discover, rather than predict, the effects of a campus crisis.
Procedure

The entire campus community being surveyed was categorized:

1. faculty and administration

2. current Marietta College students, selected classes so as to get an even distribution of:

   2a) current MC juniors and seniors (were MC freshmen or MC sophomores at time of crisis)(see Appendix B)

   2b) current MC freshmen or sophomores (were juniors or seniors in high school)(see Appendix C)

As explained in the cover letter (see Appendix A), responders answered questions related to the floods in 2004-05, and how that experience influenced their responses to the open-ended questions included in the survey. Surveys were delivered through campus mail.

Central Question:

During any type of national catastrophe in communities, students have to make quick decisions about their future. During the flood, as a prospective (high school junior or senior) or current student (MC freshman or sophomore), how has this event impacted your (or any of your friend’s) decision about attending or continuing to attend Marietta College? For faculty/administration, the question asked if they have had any conversations with students, or student’s families demonstrating concern about being a Marietta College student after the floods.
-Subquestions:

Concerning the floods of 2004-05, did you see Marietta on national news? How did that make you feel?

During the flooding and the community’s effort to restore normalcy, please describe your concerns about the campus.

Describe any recent conversations about the floods that occurred over two years ago.

What campus life or policy changes have you noticed as a result of the floods?

Describe how the college’s public image has been affected.

As a result of this crisis, how confident and secure do you feel about being at Marietta College?

Limitations of Qualitative Research

Advocates for quantitative research are quick to point out what they believe are shortcomings of qualitative research. Qualitative analysis findings could be subject to other interpretations (Kuhns 1991). Questions of reliability and validity arise more so in qualitative design (Bauer 2003). Others question how valid a theory can be if the researcher didn’t know what theory to test prior to starting research.

Potential Ethical Issues

In all studies there are potential ethical issues. In order to limit these issues, the researcher gained permission from the Human Subject Review Committee (Appendix B). The researcher has “Human Participation Protections Education for Research Teams” certification on file with the Human Subjects Committee (Appendix C). Anonymity of
the responses were assured and protected. There were no tracking devices utilized and they were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s office.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to explore how a campus community (Marietta College) was effected by a national media disaster and as a result if current campus life and operations were altered in reaction to its crisis that occurred over two years ago. In order to do this, surveys were distributed to students, faculty and administration. There are 36 faculty/administration responses and 99 student responses. Of the 99 students, at the time of the crisis being studied, 45 were a freshman or sophomore at Marietta College and 44 were a junior or senior in high school.

Theme One

The survey asked if they saw Marietta on national news, and if they did, how did it make them feel. Of the 143 responses, 17% had not seen Marietta in the media (although many of these heard about it in the news from family or friends); 83% had seen Marietta in the news.

There was a feeling of sincere compassion, pride and concern.

I felt sorry for students and staff who lost property.

I felt sad for our city and the families and students living here.

I felt embarrassed because I was fine, others in the community were not as fortunate.

SAD.

I did not see much news, was busy helping community groups get through the flooding and cleanup. I heard from people in various parts of the U.S., expressing concern for us here. That made me feel good.
Excited to get national recognition, I was home in New Jersey.

Felt proud of Marietta Community.

Actually, I was in a news clip for Columbus ABC when we walked through the flood to help the stores on Front St. save some stuff.

I had planned on visiting MC that weekend. I thought it was unfortunate.

When I came to MC, I think it was sad to see such a pretty community go through such a terrible incident, but it’s also amazing to see how well the town has been rebuilt.

Theme Two

The survey then asked, “During any type of national catastrophe in communities, families have to make quick decisions about their future. How has this event impacted your decision about continuing at Marietta College?” Of the responses, 93% indicated a non-negative response, 7% expressed negativity, although they are still enrolled two plus years later.

There is little or no effect about continuing their education on campus.

It had no great impact on me.

None.

It’s been a great conversation piece.

I feel no different about Marietta College.

The college couldn’t help it.

It obviously did not impact my decision to remain at Marietta College, and as far as I know, it didn’t impact any of my friends’ decision.

Not at all.
It didn’t change my mind at all.

It has not impacted anything in my opinion. It’s just another risk people have to understand, like any other natural disaster.

I think it helped me stay at MC. I got really involved with the community and was impressed about how well we could pull together and help Marietta.

No influence.

It really had no impact on whether or not I would come back or not, the thought never crossed my mind. I just knew not to live on the bottom floor 😊

I thought it brought the campus together and community closer together and that made me want to stay even more.

I almost transferred, but the sense of community during the floods was awesome and encouraged me to stay.

I don’t think it had an effect on attending MC. The flood was a natural disaster that could not be stopped. All MC students were safe and therefore did not effect decisions to come here.

It didn’t impact my decision to come here and I’m pretty sure that wasn’t even a thought on any student’s minds to stay or leave.

It did not really effect my decision. The other school I was looking at was recovering from Hurricane Charlie.

Many students from my high school still attended MC and if they didn’t, it was because of other reasons, not the flood.

It didn’t effect my decision at all. I was just more cautious of what could happen.
My parents were wary of me attending classes, but after seeing campus and the cleanup, their fears were lessened.

No great emotional conversation with my students. They and I simply talked about what they did during that time.

Theme Three

The survey asked, “During the flooding and the community’s effort to restore normalcy, please describe your concerns about the campus and the floods.” The responses show 88% worried about health issues, the other 12% had no worry or were mainly dissatisfied with lack of communication.

**The concerns during this time are health-related.**

That it was clean

I was concerned about the particle board retaining mold (it was thrown out)...germs and mold

I was mostly concerned about possible exposure to toxic substances in the water.

Contaminated water

Health issues

Whether the campus was going to be a healthy environment.

I was concerned about the cleanliness of the campus and possibility of illness.

The river water is disgusting.

Disease. Death. Not being able to play football and if it were safe to actually play football at MC.

Sewage problems.

What the #@!% is in our water?
Am I going to have to get shots?

I know the college won’t allow me to attend until it’s safe, but how or who decides when its safe.

Theme Four

Next, the survey asked, “Within the current 06-07 academic year, describe any recent conversation about the floods that occurred over two years ago. Responses revealed that 84% indicate no conversation or friendly, positive conversation, while 16% indicate negative conversations they have experienced.

After two years, conversation is essentially non-existent. If it does occur, it is merely casual conversation.

I’ve not had any conversations, but recently heard some students mention how hard they worked during the cleanup.

None...recently.

When referenced by upperclassmen, an experience shared as something unique to their college experience. A memory— not necessarily a fond one.

Occasional jokes about “the F word” when it looks like the river is up some.

None that I can recall.

I have not heard any.

A friend incorporated into a speech.

Anymore, we just laugh about it.

Seniors tell freshmen about the floods sometimes.
We don’t talk much about it. Sometimes we talk about “flood break”. If visitors ask, I tell them how the campus and community responded.

As a tour guide, some visiting families ask, but each year less and less.

No recent conversations.

It’s just like, “remember when...”

Just people reminiscing, especially when it rains hard.

Theme Five

The survey asked if campus life or policy changes have occurred as a result of the floods, 54% were aware of changes and 46% were not aware of any changes (remember that 31% were not yet attending).

Since the crisis, communications have improved and there are new policies to help prevent damage to property.

The new emergency email/phone alert system is great!

We can now leave our car keys with CPS over break.

When we are going to be away from campus, we can now do an online “room sign out”.

Communications are better, crisis team in place, CPS has a PA system.

I know pandemic planning was easier because of the flood experience.

Better and more timely notification.

Communication has been better.

We receive many more alert notifications, letting us know well in advance that there may be potential for something, such as a flood...and what we should be thinking about doing if it should occur.
College relations is even better about keeping campus informed.

The new emergency alert system is very, very effective. Hopefully, we will only hear “test messages”.

Theme Six

The survey group was asked to describe how Marietta College’s public image has been affected by the national attention that the Marietta community received over two years ago. These results revealed that 79% feel the image is the same (or better, in some cases), and that 11% don’t know, and 10% feel the campus is still having to deal with the negative imagery from the flood.

There has been no long-term impact on Marietta College’s image as a result of the media covering the flood crisis.

Nothing negative I feel certain. Perhaps an awareness as to where MC is.

Honestly, I think the US has forgotten all about it.

I do not see major impact.

Did not dent the image as far as I can tell.

I think people have forgotten.

I think we’ve spun it positively, by showing how the campus and community responded quickly & how we worked with the community to minimize the damage.

Many people I talk to don’t even know about the flood (if they do, they are not asking), so I don’t think we have any negative public image.

Being on the news has helped to promote MC.
I think it is more well-known and in no way a negative because the college handled it well.

The public image has improved seeing how the community pulled together to help each other.

There are still plenty of students who go here for its highly regarded programs.

I don’t think our image was affected that much at all. We didn’t have control over the flood, but did all we could to fix the damage. I am sure there are a few people who wouldn’t come here, but the majority would understand it was out of our control.

Not at All! People understand freak things happen. If anything people are more sympathetic and also MC gets more exposure.

I did not see any negative impact on the image of the college, but rather positive impact. It brought the students to be a more unified body.

It may have improved seeing how the community pulled together to help each other.

Can’t say that it has. As devastating as it was to our community, it was just a blip on the national radar. Many areas suffer much worse flooding, but do we pay much attention to them?

Theme Seven

Finally, the survey asked, “As a result of the floods, how do you feel about Marietta College being able to react to any unexpected crisis? How confident and secure do you feel about being at Marietta College.” Responses indicate 91% indicate having no concerns, while 9% feel there are some inadequacies.
There is confidence in the college’s ability to keep its campus community safe during a crisis. The campus members feel safe about being at Marietta College, and the surrounding Marietta community.

I feel confident and secure at being at Mtta College and living in the Marietta area in general. I think the public responded well to unexpected crisis as many volunteers came forth to help and I think they would do so again. I feel everyone “got it together” quickly during the crisis and got the job done. I think everyone should have a secure feeling, knowing that when times get tough, they’ll be taken care of.

I feel the town and college are much stronger. I feel safe and confident that the people of the college and town will work together to resolve future issues.

I was proud that the students worked hand in hand with the authorities even to the point of volunteering for the clean-up. I felt “town and gown” were genuinely concerned for each other.

As confident and secure as I would feel anywhere else.

I feel the same as I did before.

I think the college is prepared for emergencies. Plus, I feel safe in the community.

I trust the college!

I do not worry at all about being here.

I feel very confident that not only administration and CPS will help, but also my fellow classmates.

I believe that people here are strong…and the flood proved it.
There could always be an unexpected crisis beyond anyone’s control, but should that ever occur, I know that it will be handled in the best way possible. Marietta College has proved that it can act efficiently and quickly in the event of a crisis. I feel safe here and confident in the ability of officials.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The livelihood of any college is directly related to its ability to preserve its enrollment capacity. From that perspective, public image is important. It can take years and a tremendous investment of college funds and employee effort just to maintain a delicate, but quality reputation. There are over 4,000 colleges and universities in America, but families can choose only one college (if accepted) to attend. If through national media, a particular college has been portrayed negatively, that college may lose its credibility. Should that be the case, the answer to, “What is the state of that campus after its attempt to put the crisis in its past and make positive progress for its future?” would reveal the college’s ability to maintain its reputation, thus enabling it to attract quality applications from perspective students.

The researcher is an admission counselor for this college. During the fall, which is called “travel season”, college admission counselors visit high schools, attend college fairs, meet students, meet parents, build relationships with high school guidance counselors, and quickly, but effectively must convey the unique qualities of the college and answer questions. In the fall of 2004, this researcher was “on the road”, recruiting for this college. At a time when any college admission counselor would be marketing its positive campus qualities, this counselor and his colleagues had to respond to questions such as, “Are you still under water? How clean will your campus be? Did your rowing team bring you here tonight? Do you have water polo? How often do you flood? Do your football players also
have to swim? Will your downtown community survive? Will it be healthy for my son/daughter to attend your campus? Didn’t we see you (the college) on TV recently?”

Herein, presents the motivation for this researcher seeking theories to how this national media crisis could have an effect on a college campus.

The researcher was not surprised by how the college has been able to distant itself from the crisis, but what is surprising is how deeply the pride for Marietta and its college is woven throughout the community. Beginning with the central phenomena question about whether or not to continue at the college after such a crisis, respondents wrote of how little they were affected. In some cases, the crisis increased their reasons for staying at Marietta College. The researcher detects a tremendous amount of pride that exists on this campus.

While seeking true emotional opinions, the researcher asked an open-ended question to allow an opportunity for respondents to air the emotion they felt when they saw the Marietta flood being broadcast on national media. Instead of worrying about how awful it is to be in the news, there was much more concern from the faculty about its students’ well-being; and from students about the well-being for their fellow classmates. Most revealing, more than one responder felt “embarrassed” because their personal space was safe, while others on campus or in the community had to directly deal with the floodwaters. The most common series of words for this response was, “I felt sorry for….” The campus community is full of compassion for its campus and community members.

The responders did express health related concerns, and rightfully so. After hearing of the flooding crisis, many families googled “effects of a flood.” Once a person has done this, there would be reason to worry about their son or daughter continuing at Marietta
Effects of a Campus Crisis

College. However, while the responders expressed concern, they displayed faith in the leadership of the college to determine health and safety for its students.

In an attempt to understand the long term effects of such an event, the researcher asked about any current conversations about the crisis that occurred over two years ago. The study reveals that very little conversation now exists, and in most cases, it occurs in casual conversation. The most common response was directly related to the weather, and that was, “If it’s raining hard, we’ll often say, ‘I hope it doesn’t flood’, chuckle, then continue on with our day.” After two-plus years, the current conversations are only reflective of the “flood break”. The researcher affirms that flood discussions, especially during travel season, have diminished considerably.

In order to discover long term effects on campus life, the researcher asked what campus life changes have occurred as result of the crisis. The responders indicate noticing an increased effort from the college to provide better communications. Since the time of the crisis, the campus has implemented multiple means of communicating with its campus community. This common theme was acknowledged throughout the responses. A high-tech communication system installed throughout the campus community, including families of its students, has been implemented.

From an admission perspective, the researcher wanted to understand how the college’s public image may have been affected by the media crisis. The study has discovered that there is no long-term negative impact on Marietta College’s image as a result of the national media attention over two years ago. Another question asks for student’s sense of security at this campus, and its ability to respond to future crisis. The
study reveals that there is confidence in the college’s ability to maintain a safe campus community and its ability to respond to an unexpected crisis.

The researcher is convinced that the negative national media event has little or no long-term impact on a college campus such as what occurred at Marietta College. While it is unfortunate that a college community is portrayed negatively in the media, it is amazing how this campus was able to respond and move beyond the crisis quickly. The character of the campus exists because there is a tremendous sense of “community”. There has been a genuine expression of pride and compassion from the campus to other campus colleagues, and the citizens of its surrounding community.

The Marietta College community has confronted a crisis. The national media decided it was important for the world to view the flood. The college has “trumped” the negative media exposure, and turned this crisis into a positive. This study exposed the true character of its campus. At a time when the college was in a very delicate state, the campus members united. Not only was there a genuine sense of compassion and concern, but many campus members went into the local community and offered assistance.

This was an opportunity for the college to test its character. The college responded and made its statement, “This is a caring college community who genuinely love their campus!” The present campus is now better prepared than colleges who have never had to respond to any type of crisis.

Survey Response

The surveys for this study were delivered via campus mail and faculty hand-outs in their classes. For future consideration, electronic surveys may be a better way to increase response rate, especially on a college campus.
Future Studies

If there were a budget and time available, it would be advantageous to survey high school guidance counselors. These counselors play an integral role in assisting their high school seniors select colleges to apply.

It would be interesting to conduct a quantitative study on retention and enrollment figures during the crisis event. A qualitative study of students who did not return to campus could enhance this study. And then conduct a quantitative analysis to other college’s negative media crisis, comparing the enrollment figures.

Media Obligation

The national media is a very powerful means of swaying public opinion on issues from politics to college campuses. They can easily project a negative image for the world to witness, pack up, and leave without worrying about what they may have jeopardized with its coverage. Unfortunately, the more tragic the event, the more media outlets are present. The researcher challenges all national media outlets to create a new policy that once they have projected a negative image of an event, that within three years, they return to report on the progress since the crisis. The media’s livelihood seems to be focused on projecting tragedy and crisis, which could destroy the livelihood of a business, a college, or an entire community. Anymore, most local TV news station will begin their broadcast with a tragedy. It could be a murder, an accident involving injuries, child abuse, major crime, etc. Rarely, if ever, is the top story a positive story. Should the media be interested in
balancing their power of delivering negativity, they should volunteer to return and report some positive images of that crisis.

College students enjoying an afternoon in downtown Marietta on Front St., the community’s popular street for shopping, dining and entertainment. From the earlier picture, this street was portrayed with two to three feet of flood water.

(photo courtesy of Marietta College, 2006)

From above Marietta. Note the two rivers, the courthouse, and A part of Marietta College in the far background.

(https://www.littleriverbooks.com/photos)
The nationally recognized rowing team prepares for practice on the river. The county courthouse Tower in the background signifies the center of downtown Marietta.

(photo courtesy of Marietta College, 2006)

A picture of The McDonough Center at Marietta College, home to a nationally recognized leadership development program.

(photo courtesy of Marietta College, 2006)
Downtown Marietta centers on the county courthouse. The Columbus news reporter mentioned earlier, was standing just below the lower right corner of this picture. He had water swirling around him, knee-deep.

(http://www.galenfrysinger.com/marietta_ohio.htm)

The annual Sternwheel Festival attracts over 100,000 spectators. In the earlier picture, the floating dumpster was along this riverfront street.

(http://www.littleriverbooks.com/photos/MariettaRegatta.jpg)
APPENDIX
Appendix A

Dear M.C. Student, Faculty and Administration,

As a vital member of the Marietta College community, you obviously have pride, opinions and ideas about this campus. You also were most likely impacted by the unfortunate floods that the campus faced during the 2004-05 academic year.

I am conducting this research to explore how the campus has progressed beyond that time. I want to measure the extent of that event as it affects campus life today. I will be looking for themes of how this event has affected our campus operations, image and emotions that currently exist as a result of the floods.

Your participation in this research is, of course, voluntary. Your confidentiality and anonymity are assured. Return of the survey to me is your consent for your responses to be compiled with others. Utilizing our campus mail service, simply fold the survey so that the pre-addressed mailbox # is visible. This is a blind mailbox located at the Marietta College mailroom.

I greatly appreciate your participation in this research. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Please return the survey within two weeks. Again, campus mail will deliver this to the pre-addressed blind mailbox. Your anonymity is assured!

This research study has been approved by the Marietta College Human Subjects Committee. For questions or concerns about research subjects’ rights, please contact: Dr. Jennifer McCabe, Marietta College Human Subjects Committee Chair, 740-373-7894, Jennifer.McCabe@marietta.edu.

Thank You for your interest and participation in this study. I genuinely appreciate your time. Your responses will benefit our campus community.

Sincerely,

Scott McVicar
Assoc. Dir. of Admission
Marietta College
740.376.4606
mcvicars@marietta.edu
Appendix B

1) Concerning the Marietta floods of 2004-05, did you see Marietta on national news? How did that make you feel?

2) During any type of national catastrophe in communities, families have to make quick decisions about their future. As a faculty or administrative member of Marietta College, what conversations have you had with students or student’s families demonstrating concern about being a Marietta College student after the floods?

3) As an integral member of Marietta College, in what ways were you prepared for the flood? In what ways were you not prepared?

4) What do you think could have been done differently?

5) During the flooding and the community’s effort to restore normalcy, please describe your concerns about the campus and the floods.

6) Within the current 06-07 academic year, please describe any recent conversations about the floods that occurred over two years ago.

7) What campus life or policy changes have occurred because of the floods?

8) Please describe how Marietta College’s public image has been affected by the national attention that the Marietta community received over two years ago?

9) As a result of the floods, how do you feel aboutMarietta College being able to react to any unexpected crisis? How confident and secure do you feel about being at Marietta College?
Appendix C

1) During the floods of 2004-2005, I was…..
   _____ a current student at Marietta College
   _____ in high school, considering which college to attend

2) Concerning the Marietta floods of 2004-05, did you see Marietta on national news? How did that make you feel?

3) During any type of national catastrophe in communities, families have to make quick decisions about their future. As a Marietta College prospective or current student during the flood, how has this event impacted your (or any of your friends) decision about attending or continuing to attend Marietta College?

4) In what ways were you prepared for the flood? In what ways were you not prepared?

5) What do you think could have been done differently?

6) During the flooding and the community’s effort to restore normalcy, please describe your concerns about the campus and the floods.

7) Within the current 06-07 academic year, describe any recent conversations about the floods that occurred over two years ago.

8) What campus life or policy changes have occurred because of the floods?

9) Please describe how Marietta College’s public image has been affected by the national attention that the Marietta community received over two years ago?

10) As a result of the floods, how do you feel about Marietta College being able to react to any unexpected crisis? How confident and secure do you feel about being at Marietta College?
Appendix D

C. The general tour does not include the interior of all buildings. Please comment on your impression of the buildings you toured. (5 - excellent to 1 - poor)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1 N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonough Leadership Center</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1 N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKinney Media Center</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1 N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyson Basso Recreation Center</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1 N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilman Dining Hall</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence Halls</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1 N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermann Fine Arts Center</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1 N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Center at Andrews Hall</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1 N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rickey Science Center</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1 N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering Place</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1 N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. What did you like most about your tour? ________________________________________

E. What would you improve about your tour? ________________________________________

F. How was the general appearance of the campus? Please circle: (5 - excellent to 1 - poor)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
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</table>

Comments ________________________________________

III. Overall Visit

A. How did your visit to Marietta College compare with your visits to other colleges and universities?__________________________________________

B. Did your interest in Marietta College increase or decrease as a result of your visit?

   _____ Increase   _____ Decrease

   Why? ________________________________________________

C. Marietta College’s strong points are:

   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
Marietta College  
Human Subjects Committee  

SHORT REVIEW FORM

Send the completed, typed proposal to the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee: Dr. Jennifer McCabe, Psychology Department. Electronic submission (via attachment on email) of proposal materials is preferred (Jennifer.McCabe@marietta.edu). Proposals from student investigators must be accompanied by an email from a faculty or staff member stating that he or she has read and approved the research proposal. Each student investigator must have "Human Participant Protection Education for Research Teams" certification on file with the HSC (see HSC website for details).

Project Title: The impact of the floods of 2004-05 on the Marietta College campus community.

Date Submitted (MM/DD/YY): 04/01/07  
HSC # (to be assigned):

Contact Information

Principal Investigator(s): Scott McVear
Phone Number(s): 376-4606  
E-mail(s): mcvears@marietta.edu

Project Status

This research is for (check one):

- Faculty Project  
- Undergraduate Student Project  
- Graduate Student Project
- Class Project  
- Other (specify):

If Student Project, name of faculty supervisor(s): Dr. William Bauer

If Class Project, course name, number, and instructor:

This research proposal is (check one):

- New  
- Renewal  
- Re-evaluation

Proposed start date (MM/DD/YY) (or, if renewal, original start date):
04/16/07

Projected end date (MM/DD/YY) (or, if renewal, revised end date):
05/01/07

Does the proposed research involve:

- person(s) under 18 years of age?  
- prisoner(s) or person(s) awaiting trial?  
- known pregnant women?  
- any other person(s) who are vulnerable to risks or are possibly not capable of giving informed consent (e.g., elderly, individuals with disabilities)?  
- potentially painful or purposefully stressful

YES  NO
References


