

# Assessing a University's Emergency Communication Policies for its Vulnerable Populations

**Federico Subervi, Ph.D.**

**Professor**

**School of Journalism & Mass Communication**

**Kent State University**

**[fsubervif@kent.edu](mailto:fsubervif@kent.edu)**

**330-672-6287**

**International Crisis & Risk Communication Conference  
March 3, 2015**

# *Background*

Previous research in this arena

- California
- Texas

# *Current research*

## Kent State University

- Class: Managing Media Diversity
  - Eight students
  - Caitlyn Callahan, Jennifer Martorello, Katherine Nix, Jeonghwa Oh, Lauren Schmoll, Brandon Wilkins, Ruonan Zhang, Linxuan Zhao

*RQ (only one)*

To what extent, do some existing emergency communication systems and structures serve diverse populations within and surrounding the Kent State community?

## *Goals*

Assess current systems and structures.

Provide recommendations as pertinent based on findings.

## *The literature review*

- Disadvantaged groups have not been taken into consideration during the research.
- The definition of disadvantage groups in emergency communication needs broadening: the concept entails more than racial minority, limited English ability, older age, physical disabilities, and inaccessibility to devices and facilities needed for being safe during crises/emergency situations.
- Current studies have focused more on what higher education institutions should do rather than what they are doing to react to emergencies.

## *Methods*

- Office of Global Education
- Student Accessibility Services
- Kent State Office of Emergency Management
- Child Development Center
- Center for Adult and Veterans Services
- Kent State University Communications
- University student and social media
- Portage County Red Cross

# *Methods*

- research online
- Email
- Phone calls
- In-person interviews



# *Findings*

Kent State University Communications Office:  
“no practice is in place because all issues will  
be passed on to police and fire department.”

## *Findings*

KSU's Office of Emergency Management's website shows a communication plan that emphasizes early notification via multiple mediums: sirens, speaker systems, cable TV EAS, broadcast media, print media, university website, text, email, and pagers.

## *Findings*

However, some vulnerable groups that may have communication concerns, such as the disabled population, people from diverse cultures, people who are non-English speaking or with limited English proficiency, may not be reached or understand the emergency.

## *Findings*

Also, people who have transportation disadvantages are addressed by “Annexes,” which are described as special support departments.

# *Findings*

## Office of Global Education:

- an alert newsletter is sent to students weekly, although they do not have immediate access to international students, for example via text alerts.
- If an emergency situation were to take place, the University will send text alerts to every student, including international students ... but in English.

# *Findings*

## Media Community Manager:

- that office “will communicate via an institutional account on social media and encourage departmental account to share the messages.”
- Also, a hashtag will be created for major issues, but gaps exist when communicating with students via social media.

## *Findings*

Center for Adult and Veterans Services:

can provide email notifications and FLASHAlert texts through the University.

However, the procedures are not specifically for diverse populations. That office does not contact the adult student population regularly.

# *Findings*

## Child Development Center:

- will alert the teacher via a buzzer system and the teacher then conveys information to student via direct contact.
- will alert parents via email or phone.
- the text alert is not available; it is in progress



# *Findings*

Student Accessibility Services office:

does not have a crisis communication plan at all other than what the University has via FlashAlert emails and text alerts.

# *Findings*

## Portage County Red Cross:

- has a communication plan for general population, but not focused on diverse population.

The actual plan was not found on the RC's web site for the area.

# *Overall*

- (1) Some entities lack emergency communication plans altogether;
- (2) Of the existing plans, some lack specific considerations for vulnerable populations or immediate access to them;
- (3) Other plans with provisions for vulnerable populations are either vague, incomplete, or outsourced to other departments;
- (4) Still others have improvements planned for the future, without any identifiable timetable for implementation.

# *Recommendations*

The obvious:

Improvements needed in each of these areas.

## *Recommendations*

Not based from that study:

Centralize and coordinate information via the TV consoles across campus.

Integrate city of Kent business, government offices, organizations, volunteers.