

## Providing Language to Crisis Response and Case Management in Fraternity and Sorority Life

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Fraternity/sorority life (FSL) professionals often take on multiple roles and provide many functions for their communities. They advocate for, advise, educate, provide accountability, and act as general support for their students. Central to the work is crisis response and case management. These are often couched under the broader umbrella of advising, but crisis response and case management should be explored and named as a significant and unique responsibility of FSL professionals. This introduction to crisis response and case management in higher education should provide language that will allow professionals to better speak to crisis response and case management as it relates to their own roles.

### Crisis

Crisis in higher education can be thought of in many ways. For the purposes of this article, Rollo and Zdziarski (2007) define crisis as “an event, which is often sudden or unexpected, that disrupts the normal operations of the institution or its educational mission and threatens the well-being of personnel, property, financial resources and/or reputation of the institution” (pp. 27-28). They further describe three levels of crisis in higher education: critical incidents, campus emergencies, and disasters (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2007).

- *Critical incidents* often include one or more individuals and may or may not impact the campus community (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2007). An example of a critical incident could include a student suddenly losing their housing.
- *Campus emergencies* “[disrupt] the orderly operations of the institution or its educational mission” (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2007, p. 38). An example of a campus emergency is students protesting a campus speaker and significantly impacting campus operations.
- *Disasters* have a larger impact on the campus community or surrounding community (Rollo & Zdziarski, 2007). Disasters can include campus shootings or natural disasters such as hurricanes.

Mitigating these crises and supporting students through them often requires a case management approach by student affairs professionals.

### Case Management

Case management in higher education can be defined as “a method of connecting distressed students or employees to appropriate services in an effort to resolve their issues(s). The case manager serves individuals by arranging, coordinating, monitoring, evaluating, and advocating

for individuals or the university community who are in need of assistance” (Adams, Hazelwood, & Hayden, 2014, p. 449). Extending this definition one step further to assisting student organizations, as well as individual students, gives context to the work of fraternity/sorority life professionals.

There are many case management models used in higher education (Adams, Hazelwood, & Hayden, 2014). The “student affairs case management model” (Figure 1) provides a simple four-step approach to case management (Davis, 2010 as cited in Adams, Hazelwood, & Hayden, 2014). In the first step, case managers assess the student’s or organization’s situation. Steps two and three can happen at the same time, and involve advocating for the student or organization and empowering the student or organization to self-advocate. The last step involves providing follow-up and resolution for the student or organization.

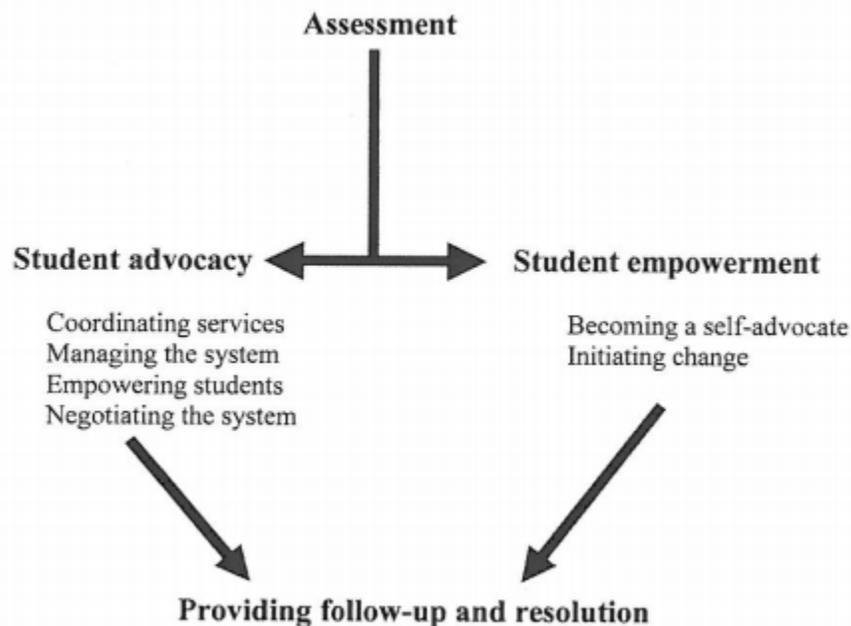


Figure 1. Student affairs case management model (Davis, 2010)

**Putting Crisis Response/Case Management to Use**

This simple model provides language, structure, and a theoretical foundation to the work of fraternity and sorority life professionals. Imagine the following scenario:

XYZ fraternity has a chapter facility housing 30 men, where the fraternity holds chapter meetings and social events, and is generally considered the gathering place for all members of the chapter. One night, faulty wiring in the house leads

to a house fire, causing a total loss of the chapter facility and all the belongings inside. Nobody is hurt in the fire, but now 30 men are without a home and the fraternity is without a gathering place.

Using the “student affairs case management model,” the first step to assisting these students (after determining everyone is safe) is to assess the situation. The case manager/FSL professional should determine what has happened, what is the impact, and what steps may need to be taken to help the students. In assessing the situation, presenting needs should be prioritized to address the most pressing needs first. In this case, finding housing for the displaced men would be the first priority, and finding meeting spaces for the fraternity would come afterward. The second step would be to advocate for the students. This would include helping to coordinate services, manage university departments and systems, and help students to negotiate with those services and systems. Examples of this could include working with the housing office to find temporary housing for the men (if available) or working with financial aid to determine if emergency funding may be available.

The third step involves helping the students advocate for themselves. This is an important step because the students will have to take control over their situation at some point. In a crisis situation like this, the case manager will have to help students through the initial shock of the situation and first steps towards mitigating the impact of the crisis. Eventually, the students will have to take over from the case manager to help determine how the situation will be addressed. Empowering students does not mean the case manager steps out of the situation completely. Instead of directly being involved, the case manager shifts to an advisory and support role. The fourth step in the model requires the case manager to provide follow-up and resolution for the students. This might look like checking in with the students, answering questions they might have about certain resources, or even re-engaging with certain departments on behalf of the students. Ultimately, this step will lead to resolution.

In four steps, FSL professionals can further legitimize the case management work they do to those who need to know what work is being done in response to a crisis. In a field where the work done by FSL professionals is often overlooked or dismissed, it is vital they have the tools to describe the important work they do. The “student affairs case management model” provides language to the crisis response and case management work already being done by FSL professionals.

## References

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