HIGHER EDUCATION CRISIS READINESS SCORECARD

15 questions every college and university should answer before the first headline

In a campus crisis, students post video, the student newspaper publishes and reporters call long before a committee can meet. The institutions that keep their community's trust decided who speaks, who approves and what the law allows them to say, long before they needed to.

> **How to use it:** Answer each question honestly with a yes or a no. Every "no" is a gap that critics and rumors will rush to fill. Count your "yes" answers and find your score on page 2.

1. PLAN AND AUTHORITY — BEFORE ANYTHING HAPPENS

01 **Do we have a written crisis communications plan reviewed in the last 12 months?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
Covering safety, misconduct, protests, athletics, cyber events and federal scrutiny

02 **Can our crisis team approve a public statement within one hour, at any hour?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
Decision authority agreed in advance among the president, counsel and the board chair

03 **Does every crisis team role have a named owner and a trained backup?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
Decision maker, spokesperson, campus police, student affairs, advancement and social media

04 **Has our president been media trained for a hostile interview in the last year?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
With at least one alternate who has practiced on camera and under pressure

2. LAW, PRIVACY AND COMPLIANCE — RULES THAT SHAPE EVERY WORD

05 **Are Clery alert templates ready, with two or more people able to send them?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
Emergency notifications and timely warnings that can go out within minutes[1]

06 **Do our spokespeople know what FERPA and Title IX allow us to say?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
Student privacy and grievance procedures limit comment on individual cases[2]

07 **Has counsel approved holding statements for our top five scenarios?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
A defined review path keeps the first statement on schedule

08 **Can we explain past hazing violations before they appear in public reports?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
The Stop Campus Hazing Act now requires colleges to report hazing publicly[3]

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

38%
of U.S. adults had high confidence in higher ed in 2026[4]

58%
of ransomware attacks on universities encrypted data[5]

2026
first year of hazing data in annual security reports[3]

3. THE FIRST HOURS — SPEED AND ACCURACY

09 **Can we reach every student and employee within 15 minutes, at any hour?**
Text, email and app alerts tested this semester with current contacts
☐ Yes ☐ No

10 **Do faculty, staff and trustees hear from us before the media reports it?**
Internal audiences should never learn the university's position from the news
☐ Yes ☐ No

11 **Do we have one update page ready to go live in minutes?**
A single source of truth for students, families, faculty and reporters
☐ Yes ☐ No

12 **Do we monitor student media, social platforms and online forums in real time?**
The student newspaper often breaks the story before any national outlet does
☐ Yes ☐ No

4. AUDIENCES AND PRACTICE — BEYOND DAY ONE

13 **Can we reach major donors, alumni and officials within the first day?**
Personal outreach from the president, advancement and government relations
☐ Yes ☐ No

14 **Have we run a tabletop exercise with a media simulation in the last year?**
Including a hostile interview and a fast-moving social media scenario
☐ Yes ☐ No

15 **Do we have crisis communications counsel on call, with an agreement in place?**
A crisis is the worst possible moment to begin a new relationship with a PR firm
☐ Yes ☐ No

YOUR SCORE

READY
13 to 15 “yes” answers
Your foundation is in place. Keep it current with annual reviews and exercises.

EXPOSED
9 to 12 “yes” answers
Each gap is where critics take hold. Close them before a real crisis tests you.

AT RISK
8 or fewer “yes” answers
Your first statement would be written under pressure. Bring in crisis support now.

WANT A SECOND SET OF EYES ON YOUR PLAN? REQUEST A HIGHER EDUCATION CRISIS READINESS REVIEW.

Red Banyan helps colleges, universities, their presidents and their boards prepare for the moments that matter most.

CONTACT RED BANYAN

Go deeper: The Full Higher Ed Guide | Crisis Resource Center | University Reputation Guide

Sources: [1] 34 CFR 668.46 (Clery Act). [2] U.S. Dept. of Education, FERPA and Title IX rules. [3] Stop Campus Hazing Act. [4] Gallup, June 2026. [5] Sophos, State of Ransomware in Education 2025. General information only, not legal advice.

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