

Hurricane Katrina Impacts a Learning College

The weekend Hurricane Katrina slammed into New Orleans started like any other for the faculty and staff at Delgado Community College. At the various campuses and sites throughout the metro New Orleans area, colleagues said goodbye with hopes for a relaxing weekend and the intention of seeing each other on Monday morning. For most, it was not evident until later Friday evening or early Saturday morning that New Orleans was in the projected path of a category five hurricane. For days, the weather service had been predicting a Florida landfall.

Prior to the storm, Delgado Community College, established in 1921, had been serving the various educational needs of the New Orleans community for 85 years. Delgado's Fall 2005 enrollment boasted a record high of 17,500 students who were attending one of Delgado's campuses or sites: the main City Park Campus on the east bank of the Mississippi River, the West Bank Campus, the downtown Charity School of Nursing, and two extension sites located on the Northshore of Lake Ponchartrain. For the previous five years, Delgado had focused on becoming a premiere learning-centered college, according to principles outlined by Terry O'Banion and others in which "everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner," and where learning comes first, "anyway, anyplace, anytime" (O'Banion, 1995-96, p,22).

The hurricane pounded into New Orleans on Monday morning, August 29, 2005. Later that morning, the levees breached, leaving most of the city under water. Residents who had not fled the city prior to the storm were now rescued from second stories and roofs by boat or helicopter, left for as many as 4-5 days on overpasses without food, water, or shade from the relentless heat and sun, and eventually bussed out of the city to distant locations for weeks or, in some neighborhoods, for months. In the wake of this natural, engineering, and social disaster, Delgado Community College and each member of its learning community has been tested and stretched to the limit.

Now, eight months after the storm, as New Orleans teeters between neglect and rebuilding, the resolve, identity, and mission of Delgado Community College has become indelibly reinforced. During this time, DCC has faced and adapted to extraordinary challenges and circumstances through innovative actions and responses which reflect the College's continued commitment to being a learning-centered institution whose success is intimately intertwined with that of the community at large. The following responses to the crisis, formulated and executed with *both short-term and long-term outcomes in mind*, provide a timely case study for educational institutions interested in disaster preparedness and response.

The Campus Police: The First Responders

Seventeen Delgado Campus Police Officers reported for duty on Sunday, August 28, with enough provisions to hold them over for the duration of the hurricane. Monday morning, immediately after Hurricane Katrina struck, officers checked out the campus and began to document the damage. By 3:00 pm, they'd observed 2 to 3 feet of water on Navarre Avenue, the street bordering the north side of campus.

Over the next two days, Lake Pontchartrain poured through the levee break at the 17th Street Canal, wrapping around the Delgado City Park campus, and making it an island of refuge. Residents seeking higher ground streamed into the campus, among them the elderly, the infirm, diabetics, and children without shoes. At one point during the day on Monday, an unidentified boat dropped off a load of nursing home patients and left. Officer Helen DeLatte said of the terrifying scenario that was unfolding, "My mission had changed from the protection of property to the protection of life."

While some officers obtained food and clothes from the Culinary and Theater Departments, two officers, Sergeant Ron Bailey and Corporal Jesus Rojas set out in a boat retrieved from a nearby Delgado warehouse to search for provisions. Officer Rojas, after spending many hours wading through contaminated neck-deep waters in order to secure provisions and help civilians, was later admitted to the hospital with a severe staph infection of his feet.

On Wednesday morning, Campus Police learned that scores of boats were staged about a mile away on Metairie Road, manned by volunteers from Acadiana, an area of Southwest Louisiana steeped in Cajun culture. Chief Ronald Doucette decided to walk everyone out within hours. Fortunately, a National Guard vehicle arrived in time to evacuate the infirm. After raising the computers in the buildings they could still access, the officers put the remaining civilians between them and escorted them to the rescue boats, using the median as higher ground as they waded through the water and climbed over railroad tracks.

Once the civilians were safely delivered to the boats, some officers returned to the campus in order to further secure it. Later, they were taken to the Causeway Overpass and let off among a throng of desperate civilians. The situation there had deteriorated and their police uniforms put them in further danger. From there, some officers were bussed to Baton Rouge, while others walked home, uncertain as to what they would find. Officer DeLatte, for example, walked for miles, first to her uncle's empty home in Metairie, about 7 miles away, and then to her own home in Kenner, about 14 miles away, only to find it completely flooded. She stayed there for a couple of days, until others came searching for her.

For months following the storm, the Delgado College Police would continue working 12 hour shifts.

The Chancellor: Pulling Together a Leadership Team

Four days after the storm, Dr. Alex Johnson, the Chancellor of Delgado Community College, established an emergency headquarters at Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC) with the “great support” of Dr. Walter Bumphus, President of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS), and Dr. Myrtle Dorsey, the Chancellor of BRCC. In the words of Chancellor Johnson, “The headquarters was home for the emergency leadership team and an oasis where displaced faculty and staff residing in the Baton Rouge area and beyond could gather. It was the place where the thoughts, strategies, and initiatives designed to get the college reopened were launched.”

The emergency leadership team included not only individuals in traditional leadership roles such as vice chancellors and directors, but also identified and welcomed those who emerged as leaders in the midst of the crisis. Key leaders with expertise in the following areas were deemed essential to Delgado’s recovery:

- Information Technology
- Communications
- Finance and Payroll
- Human Resources
- State and Federal Compliance (i.e., FEMA)
- Curriculum
- Website/Internet
- Facilities and Environmental Assessment
- Governmental Relations
- Financial Aid
- Proposal Writer
- Public Safety

The team was well-versed and practiced in a “learner-centered organizational structure designed to promote collaboration, consistency, efficiency, communications, and accountability across a multi-site community college,” Dr. Johnson reported. An emergency bank account was established for necessities, like wireless laptop computers and cellular phone with Baton Rouge’s 225 area code. (Damage done to New Orleans communications towers and the sheer volume of calls going to and from the area made cell phones with the 504 area code useless.) The team immediately developed strategies aimed at getting the college reopened as quickly as possible:

1. Determine the status of facilities and locate temporary facilities.
2. Locate students, and where possible, retain them in online courses, provide direct instruction at remote locations, or assist students enrolling at other colleges.
3. Restore information technology functions, including the website, online course

capability and student and administrative systems.

4. Launch a public relations campaign so that everyone receives regular status reports.
5. Get approval to implement administrative processes that expedite reopening the College.

In such a massive and unprecedented recovery effort, the Chancellor appointed a small contingent from the leadership team to coordinate with state and federal authorities in matters related to facilities, finances, and compliance with requirements of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Louisiana's Office of Facilities Planning and Control.

During this time, the Chancellor also found it necessary to cultivate and maintain relationships with government and private foundation agencies and officials to ensure a consistent, timely, and proactive response to the storm. He became a frequent visitor to the State Capitol in Baton Rouge and traveled often to Washington D. C. to advocate for the resources needed to offset revenue losses, to make emergency repairs to buildings, and to obtain needed equipment. With other College leaders, the Chancellor met with state and federal lawmakers, including the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, to ensure that Delgado's status was communicated and to position it for future funding opportunities.

Throughout the crisis, Dr. Johnson employed a "laser-focused" leadership style that was 'hands on,' persistent and resilient in advocating for the college. Moreover, he struck a delicate balance between being singularly decisive and demanding, yet compassionate and reassuring. Faculty and staff were reminded often of the impressive gains at Delgado both before and since the storm, but admonished to stay in the moment as they completed each step of the recovery.

Rebuilding: Mission, Vision, and a Timeline

Delgado's Maintenance manager, Gary Dominique, had not evacuated the city in the face of the hurricane. Because he stayed behind to help an elderly neighbor who refused to leave, he was able to access the campus by boat only a few days after the storm, even while other city residents found their access to the city barred by the National Guard. Dominique, along with a friend on the police force, arrived at the City Park Campus by boat, only to find what they described as a "war zone." Huge trees had toppled into the lagoon, along with other storm debris. Windows and skylights had been blown out, and there were shards of glass sticking out of the walls everywhere. Some of the buildings were still underwater. Fish were swimming in the library.

The men set about doing what they could to make some of the buildings safe to enter. They found a stench that knocked them to their knees as they opened each building on campus. Stagnant water combined with the contents of dead refrigerators and mildew

producing a powerful odor, especially in the Culinary Arts areas of Buildings 11 and 2. Without electricity, neither fans nor pumps to drain the buildings could be turned on.

Outside of the city, Adolfo Girau, Delgado's Director of Facilities and Planning, stood riveted to the TV news. After the storm, he said he had no hope for the City Park Campus. With the city in lockdown, he relied on the horrific images spread around the world and eye-witness reports to comprehend the status of the city and the campus. Aerial photos showed that directly across the street from the City Park Campus, the Olympic-sized City Park Stadium looked like a ghostly crater lake.

Wanting Delgado to open as soon as possible, LCTCS headquarters made the decision to place the College in an abandoned Winn Dixie Store in Baton Rouge, about an hour's drive from New Orleans. This facility would house Information Technology (IT) , Human Resources (HR) , Delgado staff, and hold some classes so that Delgado would remain up and running.

Shortly thereafter, however, plans changed. Girau, using his state ID and a DCC truck to get through roadblocks manned by the New Orleans Police Department and the National Guard, was able to gain access to the West Bank Campus, Gretna, and Northshore facilities. Upon an initial inspection, he determined that West Bank Campus, still intact despite minor roof and wind damage, could quickly become operational. Two days later, the decision was made to bring up the West Bank Campus rather than set up the facility in Baton Rouge. This decision became Girau's first priority. Plans were quickly initiated to hold a special three-week intersession in December on the West Bank, offered free of charge to the 250 Delgado students who enrolled.

On the Northshore, the Slidell Learning Center, consisting of only one building, was completely inoperable, but the new, smaller Covington site, would be able to continue operating for the spring semester. By the time the spring semester began, the Slidell Building had been rebuilt and was also able to accept students.

Approximately three weeks after the storm, Girau once again gained access to the city and started his first assessment of all buildings on all campuses and sites. The downtown campus of Charity School of Nursing had sustained basement flooding and roof damage, knocking out all of the buildings elevators, but Girau determined that this building, like those on the West Bank, could get up and running. Delgado personnel and contractors worked quickly to replace pumps, heating and AC units, and all electrical systems while repairing roof and water damage to the sixth floor.

Through the doggedly determined and excruciating efforts on the part of committed students, faculty, staff, and administrators, Charity began to offer classes to its graduating senior class on October 10. One hundred sixty students met in improvised classrooms in libraries, movie theaters, and at East and West Jefferson Hospitals, located in outlying Jefferson Parish; clinicals were arranged at East Jefferson. A few weeks later, students were able to return to actual classrooms, first, at the West Bank Campus and, finally, at the Charity Campus.

Nineteen of Charity's *Semester Four* Students had evacuated to Dallas and had applied to El Centro College for their last semester of classes and clinicals. In an attempt to accommodate the students, El Centro contacted the Delgado Nursing Administrators, and one of the Delgado Community College nursing instructors, Lenitra Jefferson, *enroute* to California to accept a traveling nursing job, stopped at El Centro to provide support for students attempting to enroll in the correct courses and to obtain new uniforms, books, etc. That teacher never made it to California, but remained at El Centro College as an instructor and clinical supervisor for the Delgado Community College students.

On January 24, 2006, Charity held its pinning ceremony for 160 graduates, its largest graduating class ever. Among those pinned were all 19 of the El Centro students, thanks to the dedication of both the El Centro and the Delgado faculty and administrators. (See the commencement address, "*Out of the Water*," at the end of this article.)

Girau's first visit to the City Park Campus was a different story. Downed trees and branches blocked the roadway; scores of dead cats, raccoons, and other animals littered the parking lot. Building floors were covered with shattered glass, make-shift beds, coolers, blood from evacuees, and broken vials. Of the 20 buildings on the City Park Campus, only one was still usable, although it had sustained some roof and water damage. Some of the buildings had received 8 – 9 feet of water, up to the second floor, while other, one-story buildings would have to be bulldozed. Initial assessments revealed that, should the college attempt to re-open the campus in January, only 3 buildings could be restored. Nine other buildings were either destroyed or severely compromised beyond immediate repair. These buildings housed the following facilities or services:

- *All of Student Services, including hard copies of student records on file;*
- *Math faculty offices, classrooms, and tutorial lab;*
- *Graphic Arts offices, classrooms, and computer lab;*
- *Office of Information Technology;*
- *The Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Technology;*
- *Two classroom buildings;*
- *The City Park Library, housing over 25,00 submerged volumes*
- *The Television Production Program offices, studio, and equipment;*
- *The Media Services offices and equipment;*
- *A state-of-the art multi-media classroom;*
- *The Foreign Language Lab;*
- *The Honors Program and Faculty Development Offices;*
- *Two Children's Centers (one for infants; the other for toddlers);*
- *The Offices of Workforce Development and Education and the offices of Community Outreach;*
- *The Original President's home;*

- *The Horticulture Program offices and greenhouse*
- *The administration offices; and*
- *The Power plant*

By this time, both the West Bank and City Park Campuses had been commandeered by National Guardsmen who later helped Delgado personnel cut trees, clear debris, tarp the roofs, etc. Girau carefully photographed and documented the damage done to all Delgado facilities and made a Powerpoint presentation to the LCTCS Board that they found very helpful.

Upon closer inspection Girau thought that the City Park Campus was salvageable and made it his mission to get it open. The State Department of Facilities and Planning, utterly overwhelmed with the scope of damages to state universities, hospitals, government buildings, etc., thought that the campus was a “lost cause,” and directed Delgado to hold back on any mitigation and/or restoration efforts. Chancellor Alex Johnson and Girau did not accept this verdict and “made the State aware that we **would** reopen in the Spring.” They sought and got approval from FEMA, gave invoices and purchasing orders to State Facilities and Planning, and called in their chips with local contractors with whom they had done business in the past. According to Girau, he always talked to the “general” in charge, didn’t take “no” for an answer, and held companies doing the work to their deadlines. His priorities were to get the least damaged buildings up and running, followed by the bookstore, the cafeteria, and the IT environment.

Under the able and confident direction of Robert Owens, Facilities Manager II, the central utilities building in the middle of the City Park Campus was one of the first buildings to be brought back on line. This entailed replacing the doors kicked in by the National Guard in their search for necessary tools and generators, obtaining five bids from contractors to adhere to State purchasing rules, and replacing countless motors, compressors, chillers, pumps, switches and yards of line and wiring, all of which had soaked in two or three feet of saltwater for about three weeks. Now, as Owens gives a tour of his ship-shape central utilities area, he points out things such as massive 750 ton chillers and their starters that had to be “pulled apart, cleaned, redone, and reconnected,” just like most every other piece of equipment, both small and large, in the whole area.

Meanwhile, four buildings that could be ready for occupancy by the start of Spring Semester were being cleared out, repaired and cleaned. Items removed from buildings were inventoried, documented and photographed. The housekeeping staff, decimated by the displacement of its workers, got involved. As a few minimum wage workers trickled back from involuntary exiles to places like Houston, their stories were particularly disturbing and telling. One maintenance worker recounted going to the Superdome with his wife and baby. There, they waited in misery and the false belief that they would be rescued in a timely manner.

When the busses finally arrived days later to take them away, the men were involuntarily separated from the women and children. As his wife and baby fearfully got on one bus and he on another, they had no idea of where each other or even themselves were going. After arriving at a shelter in Houston, he spent many frantic days before he learned that his wife and child had been taken to a shelter in Dallas. Still separated from his family, he is one of the few displaced survivors who had the means to return to New Orleans and report for work. With affordable housing non-existent in the area even today, other returning employees slept in their vehicles or inside the damaged buildings they were working on.

Besides gathering a labor force, another challenge was getting the power restored. Repeatedly, Entergy said they wouldn't be able to provide electricity until March or April, about mid way through the projected Spring semester. Again, "no" was not acceptable. Girau reports that less than a month before classes were to start, the Chancellor "talked to someone and we got power in two days. "

Today, all campuses and sites are up and running. The City Park bookstore has been completely renovated by Barnes and Noble, and buildings One and Four are housing face to face classes. The Student Life Center once again provides meals and a place to relax, while the second floor has been converted into a one-stop Student Services Center. Girau attributes the school's extraordinary comeback to a clear sense of mission, vision, and an uncompromising timeline.

The Information Technology (IT) Department: Building On Success

By the fall of 2005, about four months prior to the storm, the IT department had completed its move from the one-story Administration Building at the front of the City Park Campus to the two-story building at the back. For years, the College had planned to move the main server and support systems out of the danger of a major flood, but as the College continued to grow, space had always been at a premium. Finally, major re-shuffling of other departments and renovations of the second-floor space of the Francis E. Cook Building had allowed the IT department to establish a state-of-the-art facility shortly before the August 29 arrival of Hurricane Katrina.

Throughout the day on the Saturday before Katrina, IT made back-up tapes, shut down the equipment and turned off the electricity. Since Delgado is situated equidistant between Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River, back-up tapes and computers were located at the Health Sciences Center in the downtown area of New Orleans, while tapes were stored in a downtown security center. Although the College had run a complete disaster recovery test in 2004, it had not foreseen an event wherein the entire city of New Orleans would be flooded. Once the levees broke, however, 80% of the city was rendered uninhabitable, and the back-up computers and tapes stored in different locations of the city were inaccessible.

One of the levee breaks occurred at the 17th Street Canal in the Lakeview area, which is adjacent to the City Park Campus. Neighboring streets, homes, buildings and nearby

City Park Stadium were inundated with up to 15 feet of water, some soaking in the contaminated muck and incubating mold and mildew for weeks. The back of campus, closest to the 17th Street Canal break, took on the most water. Although the water didn't reach the second floor of the IT building, there was no power on campus or in surrounding areas, and city officials would later report that electricity would not be restored for months.

Immediately after the flooding, Thomas Lovince, the IT Director, called his five managers via their Nextels and created "phone trees" so they could communicate with their respective employees. The IT department reported for duty in Baton Rouge on the Friday after the storm. There, on the Board of Regents website, they examined aerial photos showing anywhere from one to six feet of water on the DCC campus.

In collaboration with the System's IT department in Baton Rouge, Delgado's IT Department redirected the College web link to the LCTCS website, thereby allowing the College to communicate with its students and employees. By September 2, just 4 days after the inundation of the city, Chancellor Johnson had posted a message of encouragement, hope, and information asking employees scattered throughout the country to contact him with their whereabouts.

A week after the hurricane, a skeleton IT crew drove into the devastated City Park Campus under police escort to assess the state of the computer center and retrieve the tapes and equipment that would allow them to restore critical services such as Blackboard, email, and the Student Information System (SIS). Among the rescued equipment were eleven 200-pound servers that the crew carried down two slippery flights of stairs illuminated by a string of lights hooked up to a generator, loaded into the van, and installed safely in a "hot spot" in Baton Rouge. Lovince drove the tapes to Shreveport where he supervised the building of a back-up system.

Meanwhile, IT's five teams (Programming, Users Support, Networking, Computer Operations, and Security) set to restoring equipment and delivering the services necessary for on-line classes, payroll, and registration. Team members commuted to places such as Baton Rouge, Shreveport, and private homes, some putting 6000 miles on their cars since the storm.

Three weeks after the first excursion into the City Park Campus, the IT department returned with an 18 wheeler to pull out the remaining hardware, containing DocuShare, the original DCC website, and student services data. With neither electrical power nor elevators, the equipment had to be dismantled and carried down the stairs, a grueling and physically exhausting three-day operation. Then, once the IT environment had been set up in Baton Rouge, cables needed to be laid, systems booted up, and diagnostics run to check all systems.

By mid-November, all critical services were up and running. A back-up system was set up in Shreveport while the original IT environment was reconstructed in Baton Rouge. Thanks to the use of fiber optic cable which withstood the waters, connectivity between

computers on all campuses was restored shortly after the campus regained power in January. Unfortunately, phone service, provided via copper wiring, would take Bell South six months to reconnect. In the interim, IT distributed Nextels to key College personnel so that business and communication could resume across the college.

Now, not only has connectivity been restored to all campuses and sites, but IT has also made it available at the temporary administration building, recently leased by the College on the West Bank. Remarkably, in the midst of crisis response, the IT department managed to upgrade campus email, even as it was being restored. If you talk to members of the IT Department such as Chris Rodriguez and Patrick Eagan, they will say this has been a very challenging but rewarding experience. "While most people were maintaining, we were upgrading. We love what we do. It's a very satisfying experience to have systems destroyed and bring them back." Lovince said these sentiments were those of the entire IT team and has these thoughts on recovery; "We have to be patient, creative, and learn to adapt and improvise. This is going to be a marathon, not a sprint. Everyday will bring successes and we will need to build on these small successes."

Accounting and Payroll: Against All Odds

On the Saturday before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, Lela Sabellos, the Delgado Director of Payroll, anticipating that the city would be without electricity for a few days, returned to campus to run payroll. However, the IT department, according to the College disaster plan, had already shut down all systems.

After the storm had passed and it became evident that no one would have access to records of any kind at the College, the College faced one of many crises: continuing to pay its employees with no payroll data. On that Wednesday, the Vice-Chancellor of Administrative and Business Affairs made contact with the LCTCS Board Office. Payroll was due out that week, and he knew that College employees would be in even more distress without their paychecks, so the Business Office immediately began working on a plan to reconstruct the data necessary to pay the college's 800 plus employees.

Delgado's bank was contacted, with the hope of retrieving the most recent direct deposit data. However, the bank's main data center, located in New Orleans East, was one of the areas hardest hit by the storm. In an effort to recover the payroll data, bank officials eventually arrived at the storage site by boat, retrieving what they could. The bank sent the data files to Shreveport for processing but found them too damaged to be of use.

The Business Office had to find an alternate plan. Without access to Human Resource software or any payroll data files, they created an Excel spreadsheet using the 2005-2006 budget information which had been submitted electronically to the LCTCS Board on the Thursday prior to the storm. The budget contained names and annual salaries which were converted to biweekly gross salaries. From reports previously submitted to the Board of Regents, the Department of Civil Service, the Office of Group Benefits, Teacher's Retirement and LASERS, they were able to fill in critical missing information as to employee classification, social security numbers, etc. Some information was not

available, like federal and state tax withholding information, so the decision was made to take out taxes consistently across the board.

Since the System Office had been closed Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday for the hurricane, 27 volunteers from that Office assisted in entering data into the Board's Peoplesoft system. Along with personnel from the Delgado Business Office, twelve System volunteers continued to work through the weekend and the Monday following the storm, which was the Labor Day Holiday. After many stress-filled days, long hours, and almost insurmountable obstacles, the majority of Delgado's employees had been entered into the system, payroll reports had been balanced and checks were ready to be printed and distributed to over 840 employees. Distribution of the checks began the following day.

Delgado reinforcements from Payroll and Human Resources began arriving on the day after Labor Day, and with Board support, began the massive task of gathering and entering employee deduction data. Furthermore, since direct deposit was not available, the College needed to decide how to get paper checks to its employees. By then, a temporary Delgado website had been set up through the LCTCS website, and the Chancellor had posted a letter asking people to call in their locations, or to fill out a posted form. Locations were given where checks could be picked up, or people could request checks mailed to them. LCTCS had already established a call center at their facility manned by their PR staff for the first weeks until Delgado employees could coordinate and man the center themselves.

Thanks to the meticulous and relentless efforts of the business office staff, themselves displaced and commuting to and within the chaotic traffic of Baton Rouge, a city bursting with evacuees, Delgado employees would continue to receive pay checks while living away from their homes and resources and buying food, clothing, and other necessities from scratch.

The Blackboard Support Team: Keeping Class in session

Delgado students, faculty, and staff, like other New Orleans area residents, took refuge after the levee breaks in shelters, cars, hotels, or, if they were lucky, with relatives and friends outside of those areas affected by the storm. Many found themselves sharing a house or apartment with scores of people and pets. As a result, evacuees often began to move from place to place on a temporary basis.

Clearly, if Delgado were to continue operating as a college, it had to become a "new learning center," where students, faculty, and staff alike were both teachers and learners. Depending on face-to-face instruction as the base of its operations would not be a workable plan in the near future, but the core mission of helping students attain their educational goals would have to move forward nevertheless. To this end, the Chancellor instructed the e-learning coordinator, Ed McGee, to offer as many on-line courses as possible.

Since Delgado email was not functional, McGee created a Yahoo group, linked it to the LCTCS website, and posted an appeal for faculty volunteers. Additionally, Debbie Lea, the Director of Curriculum and Program Development, worked closely with the academic deans to identify faculty who were capable of teaching on-line courses. According to McGee, several faculty members, many of whom hadn't taught on-line before, answered the call, and in McGee's words, "stepped out of their comfort zone and were real heroes."

Himself an evacuee who had found temporary shelter with family in Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina, McGee offered three formal on-site Blackboard training sessions in a Baton Rouge facility secured by Frank Smith, the Director of Delgado's Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Technology. McGee and Smith were also available for one-on-one tutorials while Patrick Conroy, Blackboard Workshop Facilitator, offered training in his own home in New Orleans even as he was gutting, cleaning debris, and fighting mold. McGee and Conroy also created and posted on-line Blackboard tutorials, handouts, and 10 other training items such as "Creating the On-Line Community," "Developing an On-line Strategy," and "Using the Gradebook" for those who couldn't make it to the training sessions.

Once compiled, a list of courses and instructors was posted to Conroy's website. These credit courses, offered for free to Delgado students, were advertised through the Yahoo group and other local forums such as radio stations and the NOLA.com website. Approximately one month after the storm, students were registering for on-line courses through Conroy's site.

Without access to any of the Student Information Systems data files, registration proved to be a daunting challenge, but not too daunting for Debbie Lea and her team, Time Stamm and Sean Martin. Each day, registration forms downloaded from Conroy's website would be sent to this team who were sharing one computer and a desk in a makeshift office in Baton Rouge. Working into the night for the duration of registration, they would manually alphabetize the forms, identify the students, place them into sections and provide lists of enrolled students to the Registrar. Since students who registered on Conroy's site received no confirmation of their enrollment until contacted by their instructors, the team's work was further complicated by repeated registration attempts made by the same students. Meanwhile, this team was also coordinating and monitoring the Sloan semester, a group of 5500 on-line courses offered free of charge to 2500 Delgado students by the Sloan Institute and the Southern Region Education Board as a humanitarian gesture.

Thanks to the determined efforts of the Blackboard support team, the number of on-line courses increased from 67 to 175 during the fall of 2005. In Sean Martin's words, "The on-line semester was a wonderful effort that helped a lot of people. It kept our name out there and provided service to students and faculty. We didn't sit on our hands after the storm, and doing it for free was awesome!" Many Delgado teachers who had never before taught online classes discovered that they enjoyed new ways to teach. As a

result, by the opening of the spring 2006 semester, students were able to select from 250 on-line courses during registration.

The Registrar's Office: Up When All Systems are Down

Two weeks after the storm, the Chancellor called the first meeting for all available Delgado faculty, staff, and students at the LCTCS Office in Baton Rouge. Here, a student from the Delgado Charity School of Nursing posed a question that the Registrar, Maria Cisneros, instantly recognized as an urgent need. "How can we get our transcripts in case we want to transfer to another institution?" the student asked.

Knowing that all IT systems were down, Cisneros immediately thought about the hard student records that were kept in a vault on the second floor of Building 2, located at the back of the City Park Campus, where the flooding had been the worst. While stacks of transfer requests piled up on her desk during the subsequent days, Cisneros and the two other workers who were able to return to work drove into New Orleans, entered the flooded building, retrieved a set of microfilm tapes containing student records from the vault, and put them in the trunk of the car.

Unfortunately, condensation had badly damaged these tapes. Another set of back-up tapes from the downtown location were taken to Baton Rouge. These tapes, however, could only be viewed, not modified or printed. The good news was that other institutions, in view of the catastrophic circumstances, allowed Delgado students to register with simply an email from the Delgado Registrar's Office containing information gleaned from the tapes.

The next challenge for the Registrar's Office was the registration of students into the new on-line classes. With the Student Information System (SIS) down, the Registrar's office had no way to control the registration that was going on via Conroy's website (See *The Blackboard Support Team: Keeping Class in Session.*) That is, there was no way to prohibit students who had not gone through the admission process, suspended students, or students without the necessary pre-requisites from enrolling in the classes. On November 17th SIS was restored, and six days later the Blackboard Team turned over the records of the students enrolled while SIS was not operational.

As ten staff members gathered to input the data obtained from Blackboard into SIS, yet another glitch surfaced. Since Conroy's site was unprotected, students enrolled with only the last four digits of their social security numbers, making it impossible for SIS to identify and bring up their records. Ingeniously, Wes Payne, Dean of Business and Technology, created a program that matched the students' incomplete social security numbers and email addresses with the complete social security number, thus allowing the information to be entered into SIS.

Advanced Registration for the regular Spring Semester began November 21. Now able to print transcripts and carry out registration as usual, Cisneros also had to begin reconciling the rosters of new on-line instructors who had not known that entering grades on Blackboard was not sufficient to maintain institutional grading procedures.

The Financial Aid Office: Making It Work

Upon contacting the LCTCS Office a few days after the storm, Germaine Edwards, of the City Park Financial Aid Office, learned that the college-wide Director of Financial Aid had left and that she, forthwith, would take on all the duties and responsibilities of that position. One of her first actions as college wide Director was to call the State Department of Education for guidance on what to do with the financial aid funds that had been allocated to Delgado students for the Fall semester. When asked whether the funds should be released to students or returned to the State, the Department told her to retain the funds for the time being. She then worked closely with the school's public relations office to notify students of this decision and any other subsequent information related to financial aid.

Edwards began participating in the meetings of available key college personnel held regularly on the West Bank campus and obtained a list of financial aid employees from the Office of Human Resources. She began to call each one to see who was able to report to work on the West Bank Campus; four were available. Because the West Bank did not have the necessary software to process financial aid data, Edwards and her staff drove into the City Park Campus to retrieve a hard drive, documents, and other materials.

When they entered the City Park student services facilities in Building Two, she saw a jumble of mattresses, ice chests, masks, gloves, and flashlights strewn about the floor. Fortunately, the hard drive was not damaged and, from the West Bank Campus, the Office of Financial Aid was now able to continue the work it was doing before the storm, ie. processing students for financial aid, making corrections to the FAA website, and sending out award letters. Furthermore, to ensure the seamless performance of these functions as well as the jobs of several displaced employees, Edwards worked with IT director Thomas Lovince to provide dial up access to SIS, so financial aid staffers could work from computers at their evacuation sites.

In order to meet the State Department of Education reporting deadlines, Edwards asked for and was granted permission to attend the Electronic Access Conference in Atlanta sponsored by the Department of Education. The networking was invaluable and put her in contact with individuals from the Department of Education who were of great help. "These people helped by giving me the support and personal attention I needed to make sure the deadlines were met." Thanks to the filing of one such report, Edwards made sure Delgado actually received the allocated \$10,000,000 in Pell campus based funding by submitting the names and social security numbers of all students who had been

awarded financial aid within the narrow time limit imposed by the Department of Education.

During this time, her office also managed to award a full array of scholarships for the Spring 2006 semester, increase the hourly rate of pay for work-study students from \$5.00 an hour to \$10.00 an hour, and get an additional \$2,000,000 in student based funding.

Edwards attributes the success of the financial aid office to many factors such as her collaboration with colleagues both on and off campus and the practice of consistently imaging all documents before the storm. She also speaks passionately of her staff saying, "Everyone had to step up and perform two or three jobs while performing college-wide Duties. She said, "We had to think of a way to make it work, of making a positive fix to make it better for students and employees."

Communications and Public Relations: Coming Home to Delgado

In compliance with the College's Emergency Plan, the Office of Public Relations had prepared a message to be posted on Delgado's website for students and employees, as well as a list directing people to local disaster resources. However, neither Delgado's server nor the local resources were available after the levee breaks. Furthermore, with landlines, cell phones, and most other means of communication down, it was next to impossible for key staff to communicate with each other.

On the Monday of the levee breaks, Director of Public Relations, Carol Gniady, managed to get through to Chancellor Johnson, and on that Wednesday she was contacted by Ed McGee who had launched the Yahoo site, linked to the LCTCS website. Gniady and McGee worked to craft messages to be posted on the website, and the first message of what would become regular updates from the Chancellor appeared shortly thereafter. As more and more displaced students and employees found the Yahoo site, it became an overall resource used to get information and a lifeline with which to find and communicate with one another.

Meanwhile a Call Center, manned first by the System Office in Baton Rouge and later by Delgado employees, was established. The Call Center served to help locate faculty and staff, give work assignments, and pay employees while providing students with information about the college.

Three weeks later, an abbreviated Delgado website was put onto the server of Baton Rouge Community College, reinstating campus email and posting items such as the Call Center number, the October 7 date for the beginning of the on-line semester, registration dates including those for the December intersession and Early Spring Registration, information on FEMA, the Red Cross and other external resources, a link to Blackboard, the Chancellor's updates, contact forms, etc.

As frantic efforts were made to ready the school for regular classes in January, it quickly became evident that a full-court marketing press would have to be implemented without the benefit of the usual telecommunications systems on which the College usually relies. With the widespread devastation of the city, most business and services were shut down. Residents did not have access to their homes, phones, TVs, computers, etc. Most businesses and service providers were assumed to be closed until notice of their opening appeared on hand-written or printed yard signs planted by the businesses themselves next to frequented motorways.

Gniady selected *“Come Home To Delgado”* as the overall theme of the marketing campaign. In the post-Katrina environment, she knew she would have to employ an innovative mix of traditional and grassroots advertising to get the message and information out. Because battery powered radio proved to be the most consistent and accessible source of information, traditional methods included a primary reliance on radio advertising in the New Orleans and Baton Rouge markets. The Chancellor and other college officials were scheduled on talk radio, which had become the voice and instigator of a community which felt abandoned and betrayed by leadership at all levels of government. Also, print advertising announcing early registration for spring classes and non-credit courses was purchased.

Faculty and staff input as to how to spread the word was elicited and disseminated on the DCC webpage. As a result, many faculty members telephoned students using their class rosters. Another of the many marketing suggestions implemented was the placement of four billboards relating to the *“Come Home”* theme in neighboring parishes where many residents had either temporarily or permanently relocated. It's estimated that each billboard reached over 100,000 members of a population which, by necessity, had become very mobile.

Furthermore, many grassroots efforts were launched with the help of Enrollment Services as well as faculty and staff who were eager to roll up their sleeves and pitch in. In December and January, a tent was raised in a parking lot of the City Park Campus to call attention to its spring opening and to supplement registration going on at the West Bank Campus. The big blue canvas was manned by advisors and faculty huddled next to a small heater for warmth. Meanwhile, Enrollment Services coordinated college volunteers to staff tables at malls, stores, restaurants, and parking lots on Saturdays. Informational packets were mailed to shelters in Louisiana and Texas. The Executive Assistant to the Chancellor designed yard signs and with the help of many volunteers placed them in strategic locations on both sides of the Mississippi River. Other college personnel created and emailed flyers announcing registration dates that could be downloaded and stuck in car windows. College employees who posted notices on their cars later attested to having residents waiting for them as they exited shopping centers and churches. (*See Julie's Thompson's Story.*)

While the College's distinctive green color was springing up all over the city, announcing *“Welcome Home to Delgado”* on buttons, decals, magnetic car signs and bumper

stickers, Delgado's Public Relations office received a query from the University of New Orleans, asking how we had gotten our message out so effectively!

Lessons Learned

1. Identify the emergency response team early and equip them with wireless laptops, alternate email addresses, and cell phones with paging capacity and area codes outside the region.
2. Select and arrange for headquarters and housing in advance.
3. Secure information technology at a more distant site.
4. Have a well-established communications protocol (eg., phone trees, an emergency website). Consistently maintain, update and test it.
5. Have a designated worker/s with keys to every building and room in order to provide access to emergency and government workers.
6. Provide group and individual counseling immediately .
7. Return to normal operations and sites as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Six months after the storm, flooded New Orleans neighborhoods still languish, abandoned in their lonely and hushed misery. Yet, it is with hope, determination, and resilience that Delgado Community College faces the future. (See Convocation Address.)

After Katrina, in the words of William Butler Yeats, "All changed utterly. A terrible beauty was born" (*Easter, 1916*) as the College began to adjust to the fact that nothing would ever be the same. Yet, its principles, its mission, and its focus remained unchanged and perhaps stronger than ever as people began to walk out of devastating loss and personal tragedy, gathering just days later as a community of educators whose primary purpose was to empower the success of our students "anyway, anyplace, anytime," ... no matter what.

**Delgado Community College is part of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS). In this article, "the System" and "LCTCS" both refer to the same entity.*