

Building Coordinator Program
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The Safety Office at George Mason University developed a Building Coordinator Program to address a series of issues related to building maintenance, safety and security. The program included identifying responsible parties for each of seventy academic and administrative buildings on three campuses. Those individuals subsequently identified primary and alternate Building Coordinators for their areas. A Building Coordinator Handbook was prepared for their use and orientation sessions held to provide instruction on duties. The university community was informed of the program and the various service support offices continue to assist the Building Coordinators in performing their duties.

Introduction of the Organization

George Mason University is a distributed university with three campuses in Fairfax, Arlington, and Prince William counties, and two satellite sites in Herndon and Reston. At each campus, students and faculty have access to all the university's resources, while duplication of programs and support services is minimized through the use of technology. The university's more than 900 full-time instructional and research faculty members are experts in a broad range of fields, have published widely, contributed to major research findings, and consulted with government and business.

The majority of the university's 28,000 students are from Virginia, with all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 130 countries and regions represented in the student body. While full-time undergraduates, 18 to 24 years in age, make up the largest student group, part-time graduate and undergraduate students account for nearly half of the student population.

George Mason University is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees.

Problem/Initiative

Many buildings at George Mason University are occupied by more than one department. In most cases, no single person or department was responsible for coordinating actions affecting the entire building. From a service support perspective this made it very difficult to address common use issues such as overall building maintenance, space utilization, notification of occupants in the event of an emergency and responding to a variety of other needs. From an occupant's perspective, it was unclear who to notify when a problem was encountered, who would pay for a needed repair, whether or not a problem had already been reported and where to get help in the event of an emergency.

Design

The first tasks in developing the program were to determine what to include in the program and how to manage it. That was accomplished in series of meetings among members from the Safety Office, the University Police, the Physical Plant and the Space Management Office. It was quickly established that for the program to be accepted by the university community it was necessary to stress the "safety" aspects of the program. The timing was such that the university was still very aware of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the "Beltway Sniper" and the imminent possibility of going to a "Code Red Alert." Because of the university's proximity to Washington DC, the safety and security of our students and staff was of particular concern. It was felt that our already over worked employees would accept the additional task only if it was related to an overall goal of improving personal safety. Once the general direction of the program

was established, subsequent meetings of that particular group addressed the details of exactly what to include in the program and how to present it to the anticipated audience.

The next task was to gain the support of senior management. That was accomplished in a short series of meetings between the Safety Officer and the Senior Vice President, Provost and the University's Executive Council. Again, because of the heightened awareness created by the series of events mentioned above, and the obvious need for better use of limited resources, the university's leaders readily agreed on the need for such a program and gave it their full support.

In order not to overwhelm the Building Coordinators, we decided to limit their "official" responsibilities to six functions. They were to serve as: (1) communication liaison between building occupants and the service support activities; (2) central point of contact for building evacuation planning; (3) primary point of contact in the event of an emergency in their building during normal work hours; (4) point of contact for essential service requests such as responding to an unplanned power outage. Additionally they were asked to: (5) conduct safety surveys of the building; and (6) be prepared to notify building occupants of both planned and unplanned events.

In order to facilitate the cultural shift needed to implement the program, the Safety Officer wrote a University Policy and guided it through the approval process. The University Policy provided the administrative framework to support the development of the rest of the program.

A handbook was compiled that provided guidance in all six areas, listed points of contact and provided information for expanding the program beyond the basics. The draft handbook along with a concept of the program was sent to several academic

departments, as well as a few potential building managers, for their review and comments. Surprisingly, most of the individuals we asked for input felt that even more could be required of the Building Coordinators. While encouraging, adding additional elements to the program will be reviewed after the program has been in place for at least a year.

Deans, Directors, and Department Heads were identified as the responsible agents for each building on all three campuses and they were requested to provide the names of both a primary and alternate Building Coordinator. The decision as to the responsible department head in shared buildings was made by determining which department occupied the majority of space. In several instances where the space was almost evenly divided among departments, responsibility was assigned on an annual basis to be rotated among the various departments.

A series of orientation briefings was conducted and each individual was given a copy of the handbook. The handbook was also made available on the Safety Office web site for general reference. Additional information to assist the Building Coordinators was added to each supporting office's web site and a "master list" of Building Coordinators was placed on the Safety Office's web site. The university community was informed of the program's initiation via email announcement.

In order to provide continuing support a newsletter will be distributed to Building Coordinators on a recurrent basis to share items of interest and to provide additional guidance as needed. The heads of the various service support departments will meet with the Building Coordinators on an annual basis to discuss the program and receive feedback not provided during the rest of the year.

Printing costs associated with the initial publication of the handbook were supported by the Safety Office's budget. The Safety Office provided all administrative support to the orientation sessions and assisted in web page development at no cost to the participants or other service support offices.

Implementation

Since this was a self-initiated project, there was no external deadline. However, consideration was given to coordinating the initiation of the program with the academic calendar. Since a number of the academic department heads were asked to identify Building Coordinators and many of their staff and faculty vacation during the summer months, beginning the program several weeks following the start of the fall semester was deemed appropriate.

Only one academic department head felt that the program placed too much of a demand on his already stressed staff. By elevating it to the Dean of the College, the "problem" was resolved amicably.

Benefits

The program is in its infancy so objective benefits have not yet been evaluated. Subjectively however, we have received positive feedback from a number of Building Coordinators who appreciated the information provided in the handbook and orientation sessions. They also expressed a renewed interest in addressing long standing issues in their various buildings and were no longer inclined to take the approach that "someone else will take care of it." Additional feedback from several few Building Coordinators indicated that they now feel empowered to pick up the phone and contact someone to take action to resolve the problem and feel confident that their request will receive .