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Lessons Learnt From Hurricane Katrina.

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Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and its suburbs on Monday August 29th, 2005. The previous Friday morning, August 26, the National Hurricane Center indicated that Katrina was a Category One Hurricane, which was expected to hit Florida. By Friday afternoon, it had changed its course, and neither the city nor Xavier University was prepared for this unexpected turn in the hurricane's path. The university had 6 to 7 ft of water in every building and Xavier was closed for four months. Students and university personnel that were unable to evacuate were trapped on campus and transportation out of the city became a logistical nightmare. Email and all electronic systems were unavailable for at least a month, and all cell phones with a 504 area code stopped working. For the Department, the most immediate problem was locating faculty and students. Xavier created a list of faculty and their new email addresses and began coordinating with faculty. Xavier created a web page with advice for students, and the chair of the department created a separate blog with contact information for students. The early lack of a clear method of communication made worse the confusion and dismay among the faculty on such issues as when the university would reopen, whether the faculty would be retained, whether they should seek temporary (or permanent) employment elsewhere, etc. With the vision and determination of President Dr. Francis, Xavier was able to reopen the university in January and ran a full academic year from January through August. Since Katrina, the university has asked every department and unit to prepare emergency preparedness plans. Each department has been asked to collect e-mail addresses (non-Xavier), cell phone numbers and out of town contact information. The University also established an emergency website to communicate. All faculty have been asked to prepare to teach classes electronically via Black board or the web. Questions remain about the longer term issues of the size and stability of the faculty.