

MAR08-2007-003647

Abstract for an Invited Paper
for the MAR08 Meeting of
the American Physical Society

Hosting a Katrina Evacuee.

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No individual or institution anticipated the impact on the academic research community of hurricane Katrina. When Tulane physicist Wayne Reed asked me to host his research group just a day or two after the disaster, with no authorization or understanding of the commitment, I agreed immediately and then pondered implications. Fortunately, colleagues helped in making the commitment real, only the bureaucracy of my public university posing small hindrances. Industry was remarkably generous in providing Reed with significant “loaner” equipment, and amazingly, a suite of custom Reed experiments was running within weeks. At the end, the most productive collaborations for Reed seemed not to have been with my group, with its similar research, but to other groups at my institution, particularly the synthetic chemists, who gained access to methods previously unique to Tulane while offering samples previously unique to UMass. Quickly designed projects exploiting this match turned out remarkably productive. Although begun with trepidation, hosting of Reed had huge positive benefits to me and UMass, and I believe, also to Reed and Tulane. Some key lessons for the future: (i) industry has capacity and willingness to help academic research during disruption (ii) commitment of a host institution must be immediate, without a wait for formal approvals or arrangement of special funding – delay leads only to discouragement, (iii) continuing academic progress of displaced students must come first, and (iv) intellectual synergy rather than overlap should be the basis for seeking a host. Lastly, NSF or other funding agency should consider a program directly addressing the research needs of unexpectedly disrupted academic scientists, and most particularly, graduate students who face greatly extended studies.