

# Exploring Response Pathways for Emergencies Among University Students

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**Abstract:** With the deepening of higher education massification and ongoing social transformation, emergencies involving university students have shown new dynamics, including diversified triggers, network-mediated dissemination, and amplified societal impact. These developments pose formidable challenges to the governance capacity of higher education institutions. Focusing on the core characteristics of such emergencies—namely, their high public visibility and strong stakeholder participation—this paper analyzes their nature and defining features, identifies current deficiencies in universities’ early warning systems, response procedures, educational guidance, and communication practices, and proposes systematic response pathways. Specifically, it advances strategies across five dimensions: institutional mechanism development, technological enablement, educational guidance, communication and responsiveness, and post-crisis optimization. The study aims to provide actionable insights for universities seeking to establish a comprehensive “prevention–response–aftermath” emergency management framework.

**Keywords:** University students; Emergencies; Emergency management; Early warning systems

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In recent years, the gross enrollment rate of higher education in China has continued to rise. The expansion of university scale and the diversification of student composition have drawn campuses into ever-closer interaction with society, allowing a wide range of risk factors to penetrate university life. From collective student petitions triggered by dormitory air-conditioning disputes to psychological crises arising from employment anxiety at multiple institutions, emergencies involving university students now span domains such as mental health, campus safety, public opinion, and public health. These incidents not only disrupt the normal academic order but, amplified by the communication dynamics of new media, also attract extensive public scrutiny. The \*Emergency Response Law of the People’s Republic of China\* and the \*Implementation Measures for the Accountability System of Safety and Stability Work in Higher Education Institutions\* clearly stipulate that universities must establish and improve their emergency management systems. However, in practice, many institutions remain at the stage of “passive post-event response,” lacking systematic mechanisms for prevention and preparedness. Within this context, optimizing strategies for handling student emergencies and enhancing risk prevention and crisis response capacities have become critical tasks in advancing the modernization of campus governance.

## 1. The Connotation and Characteristics of Emergencies among University Students

### 1.1 The Connotation of Emergencies among University Students

The concept of “emergency” was first advanced by German sociologist Ulrich Beck in his seminal 1986 work *Risk Society*. In Chinese scholarship, emergencies are generally understood as sudden incidents within a defined scope that endanger public life, property, social order, and safety, and may even affect national interests or global stability, thereby requiring immediate organizational response. Within this framework, emergencies among university students can be defined as incidents in which students are either the primary actors or victims, occurring on or off campus, triggered by natural, human, political, or other factors, and independent of institutional will. Such incidents adversely affect students’ physical and mental health, disrupt teaching and administrative order, and may damage public property and institutional reputation.

### 1.2 The Characteristics of Emergencies among University Students

Although student emergencies share common features with broader societal emergencies, the distinctive attributes of the student

population confer specific characteristics:

1.2.1 Group specificity. Students are invariably involved as initiators, victims, or both. While receptive to new ideas, their limited social experience often constrains judgment. The transition from regimented secondary schooling to the open, diverse environment of university life may foster confusion or extremity of thought. When internal tensions remain unresolved, the likelihood of emergencies increases. At the same time, the simplicity of students' social networks, combined with immaturity, low vigilance, and weak self-protection, makes them especially vulnerable.

1.2.2 Sudden occurrence. Student emergencies typically arise independently of institutional will and often without warning. Their onset is hard to detect in advance, while their location, scale, and trajectory remain unpredictable. Their rapid development and dissemination complicate timely intervention.

1.2.3 Extensive influence. Universities, as centers of talent cultivation and youthful aspiration, are under constant public scrutiny. The high density of students on campus, coupled with the speed of modern communication technologies, means that emergencies can spread quickly and generate long-lasting effects. Dissemination occurs not only within campuses but also through broadcasting, digital media, mobile platforms, and print outlets, extending their influence to society at large.

1.2.4 Serious consequences. The specificity of the student population amplifies the severity of outcomes. These include harm to the physical and psychological well-being of those directly involved, ideological and emotional repercussions for peers, and broader ripple effects across other universities, the higher education system, and society as a whole.

## **2. Analysis of Existing Problems in Emergency Management of University Student Incidents**

At present, emergency management systems for university student incidents exhibit significant shortcomings, rendering them inadequate for the risk prevention and control needs of the new era. These deficiencies are concentrated in four areas:

### **2.1 Weak Early Warning Mechanisms and Delayed Risk Identification**

Most universities lack systematic early warning systems. Monitoring still relies heavily on counselors' manual observation, while the application of big data and artificial intelligence remains limited, making it difficult to detect psychological or behavioral risks in a timely manner. In addition, serious information silos persist among counseling centers, student affairs offices, and colleges, with no effective data-sharing mechanisms.

### **2.2 Poorly Standardized Response Procedures and Inefficient Coordination**

Responsibilities are often unclear. Student affairs and security offices typically lead emergency management, but the roles of academic and logistics units remain undefined, leading to fragmented management and bureaucratic shirking. Many emergency plans are superficial, with some universities copying generic templates without tailoring them to student incidents. Resource support is also weak: dedicated funds are insufficient, emergency supplies such as fire extinguishers and first-aid kits are understocked, and response teams are largely composed of part-time staff with limited training, undermining operational effectiveness.

### **2.3 Limited Effectiveness of Educational Guidance and Weak Student Competence**

Emergency education tends to prioritize form over substance. Content focuses narrowly on traditional areas such as fire and traffic safety, while neglecting emerging risks such as psychological crises and online public opinion management. Methods remain dominated by lectures and pamphlets, with little emphasis on interactive approaches like simulations or drills.

### **2.4 Ineffective Communication and Public Opinion Management**

Some universities adopt a "cover-up" approach, delaying or withholding information and thus fueling rumor proliferation. Communication with students and parents is limited, lacking regular feedback platforms. Responses to online public opinion are also unsystematic, reducing the ability to guide rational discussion and increasing the risk of negative sentiment escalation.

## **3. Response Pathways for Emergencies among University Students**

Given the complex dynamics of student emergencies, it is essential to construct a comprehensive, multi-dimensional response system. This can be advanced through five key dimensions: institutional mechanisms, technological empowerment, educational guidance, communication and responsiveness, and post-crisis optimization.

### **3.1 Building a "Trinity" Institutional Framework**

University emergency management has long been constrained by an overemphasis on post-event response. A closed-loop mechanism should therefore be established across three stages: early warning, in-event response, and post-event recovery. Early warning centers on risk detection and intervention; response requires clear procedures and accountability; recovery involves support

and evaluation. Relying on a two-tier structure (university and college), institutions should set up dedicated bodies led by senior administrators, supported by publicity, student affairs, and security departments. At the college level, working groups of administrators, counselors, and student leaders should be organized. Such arrangements ensure adequate resources, prevent inefficiency, and avoid unresolved outcomes.

### **3.2 Leveraging Technology for Early Warning**

Drawing on social early warning theory, universities should build a four-tier monitoring network—university, college, class, and dormitory. With the aid of artificial intelligence and communication platforms (e.g., WeChat, QQ), institutions can track students' ideological and behavioral dynamics in real time. A database integrating consumption, attendance, and interaction data, analyzed through big data techniques, enables the identification of risks in advance, shifting management from “passive response” to “proactive prevention” and mitigating crises such as psychological distress or collective petitions.

### **3.3 Advancing a “Four-in-One” Education and Support Model**

Emergencies linked to educational deficiencies call for a holistic framework integrating life education, safety education, legal education, and psychological education. Life education cultivates respect for life; safety education builds practical skills through drills; legal education fosters compliance awareness; psychological education strengthens emotional regulation. At the same time, social support should be expanded by mobilizing families, communities, and social organizations, ensuring material and psychological assistance and fostering stronger campus–society integration.

### **3.4 Strengthening Communication and Rapid Response**

With growing student awareness of rights, institutions must expand channels for expression through forums and online platforms, thereby addressing concerns substantively rather than formally. In emergencies, universities should follow the “golden four-hour rule”: arrive on site, verify facts, contact parents, and report promptly. To mitigate public opinion risks, institutions should maintain unified messaging and timely disclosure, providing authoritative information to guide public discourse effectively.

### **3.5 Enhancing Post-Event Evaluation and Iteration**

After each emergency, systematic reviews should identify weaknesses in early warning, response, and communication, leading to targeted improvements. Continuous follow-up on affected students' psychological and academic status is necessary to remove residual effects. Through ongoing reflection and iterative enhancement, universities can steadily professionalize emergency management.

University emergency response is inherently large-scale, complex, and systemic, posing new challenges to institutional governance. Administrators must integrate this work into daily management, adopt multi-dimensional approaches, and innovate in line with contemporary student characteristics. In doing so, they can enhance governance capacity, ensure a safe and stable learning environment, safeguard student well-being and institutional reputation, and advance both theoretical and practical progress in emergency management.

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