

Aviation Flight Safety Program

During one of our principal consultant's tenure as the business school dean at a New England regional state university, the aviation department was part of the business school. This department conducted a pilot training program operating 11 aircraft and flying over 100 student pilots each year. Through this program, they were introduced to aviation's concept of a Safety Management System (SMS) and Tabletop Safety Exercises. Each semester, the departmental safety officer conducted a safety tabletop exercise. A wide range of individuals would be asked to participate—students, instructors, flight program managers, campus police, university communications, personnel from the airport where they were located, and their representative from the FAA. On one occasion, they invited the regional FBI office to attend and were joined by a representative! The process was similar on each occasion—the safety officer introduced a hypothetical or an actual incident (typically an airplane crash) to the group and then led a discussion among the participants as to whom would do what when. Operations manuals were referenced for proper procedure, and individuals outside of line flight operations commented on how their particular operations needed to be involved in an actual incident. Each exercise revealed new elements of how to work together in a crisis situation. During one simulation, they discovered that the phone number for the airport tower was incorrect in the operations manual—something that could have wasted vital minutes in an actual incident. They discovered how important this kind of planning is several years into their tenure when they had to deal with an actual incident. During this actual incident, they were amazed at how calm their director of flight operations was in dealing with the incident (See [“Hiccup Leads to Uneventful Event”](#) if you're interested in the details). Simulating how to respond to crises makes a huge difference in what the actual crisis looks like when you experience it.