# Explanatory Case Study of the Authur Pendragon Cyber Threat: Socio-psychological and Communication Perspectives

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**Abstract.** Cyber(terrorism) threats posted via social media are capable of devastating, real-world effects, including miscommunication and rumors, panic, and financial loss. This manuscript details a case study of the cyber(terrorism) threat that occurred at The University of Alabama on September 21, 2014, referred to as the Authur Pendragon incident. The Authur Pendragon threat led to a week of fear, social media hyperactivity, and the propagation of rumors, all of which reached beyond The University of Alabama campus. A timeline of the event, which includes social media posts, official University responses, and mass media coverage, are presented followed by an analysis of the case from both a socio-psychological and communications perspective. Recommendations for managing cyber threats and rumor mongering are provided as well as future research suggestions.

**Keywords:** Cyberterrorism · Cyber threat · Authur pendragon · Rumor mongering · Social attachment model · Affiliation

## 1 Introduction

According to a report released by the International Telecommunication Union, approximately 3 billion people, or 40 % of the world's population, are Internet users [1], and there are approximately 1.64 billion smartphone users worldwide [2]. In 2014, the most popular social media site was Facebook, followed by LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, and Twitter [3]. Application software, known as "apps", is also a popular feature on mobile devices that are downloaded by the user to perform a particular function (e.g., sharing images/videos, communicating). There is no doubt that the globalization of technology and the popularity of digital devices have impacted the way we communicate and socially interact with others, and this impact, of course, includes the rise in social media threats.

According to Britz [4], cyberterrorism is "the premeditated, methodological, ideologically motivated dissemination of information, facilitation of communication, or, attack against physical targets, digital information, computer systems, and/or computer programs which is intended to cause social, financial, physical, or psychological harm

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to noncombatant targets and audiences for the purpose of affecting ideological, political, or social change; or any utilization of digital communication or information which facilitates such actions directly or indirectly" (p. 197). Cyber(terrorism)[1] threats posted via social media are capable of devastating, real-world effects, including miscommunication and rumors, panic, and financial loss [4]. This manuscript details an explanatory case study of the cyber(terrorism) threat that occurred at The University of Alabama on September 21, 2014, referred to as the Authur Pendragon incident. An explanatory case study is appropriate for contemporary events that are out of the authors' control, and the goal is to identify possible explanations for a set of events [5]. The Authur Pendragon threat led to a week of fear, social media hyperactivity, and the propagation of rumors, all of which reached beyond The University of Alabama campus. A timeline of the event, which includes social media posts, official University responses, and mass media coverage, is presented followed by an analysis of the case from both a socio-psychological and communications perspective. Recommendations for managing future cyber(terrorism) threats and rumor mongering are discussed.

## 2 Authur Pendragon Cyber Threat

On Sunday, September 21, 2014, a threatening comment was posted following a YouTube video about "racist sororities" at The University of Alabama (UA) by the username Authur Pendragon (see Fig. 1). This post directly threatened fraternity and sorority (collectively referred to as "Greek") students at UA in response to allegations of racism. Since 2011, the University of Alabama is home to the largest fraternity and sorority community in the United States with over 9,500 undergraduate student members and 59 Greek organizations (see greekaffairs.ua.edu).

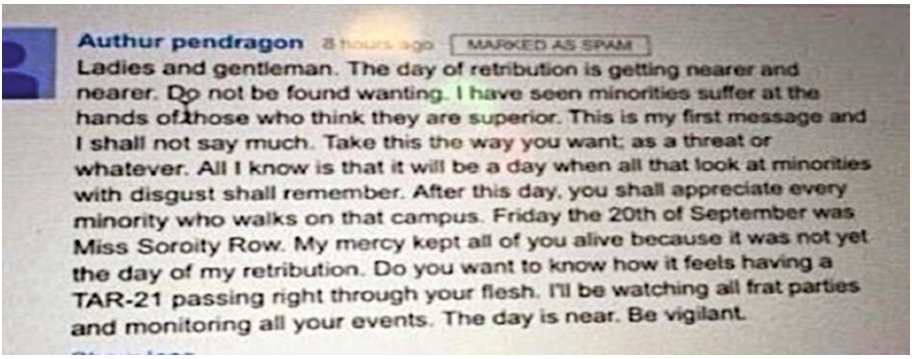



**Fig. 1.** Original Authur Pendragon threat posted Sunday, September 21, 2014 on a YouTube video.

[1] There is no consensus on the definition of a cyberterrorist threat, and the authors are not arguing whether or not the case presented is a cyber threat vs. cyberterrorism threat. Therefore, the authors will use cyber (terrorism) threat to denote this distinction.

YouTube is one of the largest video hosting websites where users can post comments to videos through self-created usernames. Although the exact time of the original post could not be confirmed, by 9:30 pm that same day, Tutwiler Hall, an all female dormitory, was locked-down after a concerned parent of a student read the cyber threat online and contacted The University of Alabama Police Department (UAPD). This student claimed that there were armed gunmen in Tutwiler Hall as a result of the Authur Pendragon post. Tutwiler Hall remained under lockdown until Monday (9/22) morning shortly after midnight while The University of Alabama Police searched all 14 floors for armed gunmen (see Appendix 1 for full timeline visualization).

### 2.1 Social Media Communications

During the Tutwiler Lockdown, students turned to the Internet for answers, specifically social media. For example, Twitter is a popular social media site that allows users to create an account and post, or "tweet", 140 text characters or less. Students tweeted "first-hand accounts" of the Tutwiler lockdown along with pictures, videos, and news links showing UAPD's presence. When the same topic circulates on Twitter, it becomes "trending" news, and "hashtags" serve as titles or keywords making it easier to search for specific topics. Although the Authur Pendragon post was removed sometime during the Tutwiler lockdown, the image was already circulating around Twitter through the trending hash tag, #Pray4Bama. #Pray4Bama reached users across the country. For example, a Texas A&M student tweeted a comment in response to the Tutwiler lockdown at 11:35 pm Sunday night (see Appendix 2/Section 4/Image 2).

In addition, as information circulated on the Internet about the lockdown and the Authur Pendragon threat, rumors spread that individuals wearing *joker masks* were in Tutwiler Hall, *machetes* were stabbed through fraternity doors, and students were being *choked* on campus. Over the course of several days, the rumors were so prevalent that a formal email was sent to the entire campus community by UAPD directly dispelling the rumors and addressing safety concerns by students and parents. By Monday morning, faculty across campus reported a noticeable drop in student attendance. In fact, there were reports of Greek social organizations encouraging their members to not attend classes due to safety concerns.

At 10:30 am on September 22, 2014 (Tuesday), a second post by Authur Pendragon surfaced on social media via an email that was sent to Ian McDaniel (see Fig. 2). Students again reacted quickly by circulating an image/screenshot of the new message via social media.

However, the Twitter conversation moved to other channels of social media, specifically Yik Yak. Yik Yak is an app that allows users to post *anonymous* comments to people who are geographically located within a certain mile radius; these comments are cycled through quickly depending on the frequency of posts, so the more comments being posted, the faster newer comments replace older comments, which gives the sense of being a "real-time" feed of information. On Yik Yak, rumors quickly spread as well as theories and investigative strategies for locating Authur Pendragon (See Appendix 2/Section 4/Image 5). According to Baker, there has been a rise in the number of social media threats in the United States via Yik Yak [5]. Since Yik Yak's

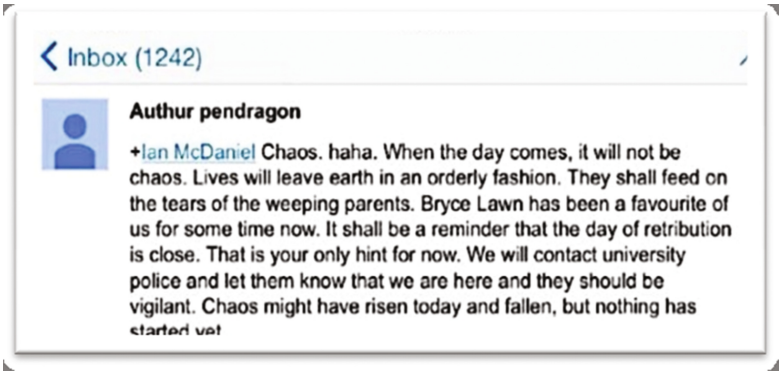



**Fig. 2.** Second post by Authur Pendragon on Tuesday, September 22, 2014.

creation in November 2013, several students have been arrested for posting cyber threats on Yik Yak [6, 7].

Campus not only talked about the two Authur Pendragon threats, they also discussed the appearance of suspicious text messages from a person claiming to be Authur Pendragon. Specifically, text messages were sent to Greek affiliated students telling them to hand over their fellow members in order to save their own lives. The text messages were reported to UAPD, and a suspect named Dakota John Timm was arrested the following day. However, students were skeptical, and screenshots of the threats continued to circulate on social media (see Appendix 2/Section 2/Image 1).

Although Twitter and Yik Yak were the largest social media forums during the Authur Pendragon incident, students discussed the threat via GroupMe, a group messaging app. Around midnight of Wednesday, September 23rd, a second set of text messages were sent via GroupMe from someone claiming to be Authur Pendragon. This message also demanded Greek students to turn over other Greek students as ransom (see Appendix 2/Section 2/Image 2). However, this second set of threats quickly circulated on other social media forms, including Twitter. Eventually, another student was arrested, Daniel Simmons, who confessed to UA Police that he sent the messages but only meant them as a prank; Simmons thought that his friends would know it was a joke based on his usernames, "Ray Rice/Sid the Sloth". Please see Appendix 2 (Section 2) for other examples of social media communications involving Authur Pendragon.

Finally, Reddit.com is not a social media platform; however, students used the site during the Authur Pendragon incident to generate investigative leads. Reddit has different sections, known as subreddits, which help categorize topics of interest for the Reddit community, a community made up of individuals known as Redditors [8]. In response to Authur Pendragon, Redditors actively engaged in vigilantism on two different subreddits; specifically, they researched and identified "persons of interest" and some Redditors actually contacted law enforcement, as well as one of the current authors, hoping to provide investigative leads. Please note that the Appendix does not cite or include any information from the subreddits; the current authors felt they were ethically obligated to protect the identities of the individuals discussed on the subreddits.

### 2.2 University Public Email Communications

The University sent the majority of its responses to the Authur Pendragon threat via campus email. For instance, UA sent its first email just after the Tutwiler Lockdown was lifted around 12:06 am on Monday, September 22nd. This email informed students that no gunmen were found in Tutwiler and the lockdown had been lifted (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 1). A follow-up email was sent later that morning at 9:36 am addressing the lockdown and explaining how the University was handling the situation (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 2). However, the University did not formally address the Authur Pendragon threat until 2 h later (i.e., Monday, September 22nd at 11:22 am). The UA Chief of Police sent out a formal email to the student body discussing the Authur Pendragon post on YouTube as well as the FBI's involvement with the case (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 3). The last email on Monday the 22nd at 5:10 pm from the University formally addressed several rumors circulating campus (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 4), including:

- There was no machete with a note on the door of a fraternity
- No one dressed as the Joker was in Tutwiler or on sorority row
- There was not a man on sorority row with a box tied to him in a threatening manner
- No one was shot and no one has been arrested, and
- No students were choked on the Quad or anywhere else.

These rumors may seem unusual; however, there were screenshots of them trending on social media, which gave the rumors a sense of legitimacy because "proof" existed.

Despite the four emails sent by UA on Monday, social media continued to buzz with rumors, and students were discouraged to attend class by concerned parents and members of the Greek system. Thus, on Tuesday, September 23rd, the University responded with more frequency by sending out multiple emails in what appears to be an attempt to stop the rumors. The first email came at 6:15 am and informed students that the Interim Vice President of Student Affairs would be available to address questions and concerns that morning (see Appendix/Section 3/Image 5). A second email was sent at 9:47 am discussing the FBI's involvement in the investigation, and it announced that the student who sent threatening text messages had been identified and arrested. This email also stated that classes were to continue as planned and directed students with concerns to contact the University's counseling center (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 6). At 10:24 am, another email directed parents and students with concerns to the UA call center (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 7). At 1:35 pm, UA urged students and parents to follow UA's official Facebook page and emails – specifically, UA stated in this email that no new prank messages had arisen despite rumors on social media (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 8).

By 5:08 pm, the University informed students via email that a 20-year-old student had been arrested and placed in jail under a $2,500 bond. The student was reportedly responsible for the threatening text message on the night of Monday September 22nd. However, the source of the original threat by Authur Pendragon still remained unidentified (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 9). At 5:35 pm, the Provost of The

University of Alabama emailed the student body informing them that they would not be penalized for missing class, but they were expected to make up the work (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 10). After the Provost's email, communication from the University ceased for the remainder of Tuesday.

The campus community only received one email from the University the following day (Wednesday, September 24th). This email confirmed that the University would function normally; however, students were not required to attend class if they had concerns. The email also encouraged all students to call the help lines regarding any safety concerns (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 11s). On the following day, Thursday, September 25th, the first email was sent at 6:05 pm with a long address from the University's President, Dr. Judy Bonner. Dr. Bonner summarized the week's events and described in great detail the level of security that the University implemented to protect its students (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 12). At 11:11 pm that same evening, the University addressed a rumor on social media that another person was arrested, and officers interviewed a person wearing a Halloween mask on campus (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 13).

On Friday, September 26th at 4:00 pm, the University sent out an email informing students that no new threatening messages had been posted, classes/attendance would resume as normal on Monday, and the University would only give updates when new information was available regarding the original threat (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 14). This same email also referenced several other universities that had experienced threatening messages through social media. The last email from the University on the subject of Authur Pendragon was sent the following week on Tuesday, September 30th at 3:22 pm. It informed students that Daniel Simmons was arrested on charges of making a terrorist threat; Simmons was responsible for the threat that was posted on the fraternity GroupMe that circulated the night of Wednesday, September 24th. However, it was believed that Simmons was not responsible for the initial Authur Pendragon threat (see Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 15). After this email, communication from the University on the Authur Pendragon case ceased.

### 2.3 Mass Media Communications

Local, state, and national media reported on the events following the Authur Pendragon threat. The University of Alabama's newspaper, *The Crimson White*, was the first newspaper to publish an article about the lockdown at Tutwiler Hall at 9:44 pm [8]. Following *The Crimson White,* a state level newspaper, *AL.com,* posted early Monday morning an article that discussed the Tutwiler's lockdown being attributed to "social media posts" [10]. A few hours later, this story made national news with *USA Today*'s article at 3:36 am [11]. While many articles cited "social media reasons" for the lockdown, Authur Pendragon was first mentioned by local news station, *Tuscaloosa News*, on their website at 7:00 am citing the Authur Pendragon threat on YouTube [12]. While other national articles were written on the topic of social media threats and the lockdown at Tutwiler [13, 14], at 12:30 pm, Authur Pendragon finally received national mass media attention by *The Huffington Post* [15].

After September 22nd, only local and state media reported on incidents concerning the threats and The University of Alabama [16–20]. However, a few noteworthy articles should be mentioned. *AL.com* posted an article on Tuesday September 23rd about the second Authur Pendragon post [21]. Also, *Tuscaloosa News* published an article at 11:00 am about Dakota Timm's arrest for sending threatening text messages [22, 23]. Finally, the last news article was published on Tuesday, September 30th by *AL.com* addressing a second arrest of a student for sending the second set of threating texts through Group Me by Daniel Simmons. This article also summarized the week's events, including the original Authur Pendragon threat, the Tutwiler Hall Lockdown, and other related concerns [24]. Please see Appendix 1 for a detailed timeline of the events discussed.

## 3 Socio-psychological and Communication Studies Perspectives

Although the Authur Pendragon case remains currently inactive, it provides a unique opportunity to study a community's response to a cyber(terrorism) threat, as well as the acceleration of rumor mongering on social media. Mass-mediated fear plays a critical role in terrorism threats, specifically the fear and vulnerability that steams from the threat of physical harm [25]. However, the fear that results from a cyberterrorism threat may be in response to threats other than physical harm and violence, such as economic harm or the disruption of critical infrastructures [26]. The Internet is the perfect vehicle for terrorism, including recruitment of members, attacking computer systems, as well as, posting threatening messages, which can quickly circulate through cyberspace. In addition, the globalization of communication technology allows a cyber threat posted on a YouTube video to be capable of spreading so quickly that it outpaces rational thought – as seen with the Authur Pendragon case.

It is traditionally believed that the common response to threats of terrorism or natural disasters is mass panic. Mass panic is the "acute fear reaction marked by loss of self-control which is followed by nonsocial and nonrational flight" [27]. However, mass panic or "mass flight" is uncommon and quite rare [28, 29]. Instead, the normal reaction of "fear" (not mass panic) should be expected [30], as well as sociotropic fear, which is the general fear for society or the community [25]. As seen with the Authur Pendragon case, there was a generalized fear for The University of Alabama community, specifically the Greek system that was targeted by the message; however, there is no evidence of mass panic or uncontrollable flight – even after the explosion of rumors on social media.

Instead, the community responded according to Mawson's social attachment model of group behavior, which recognizes the more common response of affiliation [28]. Affiliation is "seeking the proximity of familiar persons and places, even thought this may involve approaching or remaining in a situation of danger" [28]. Mawson argues that the separation from an attachment figure is more stressful than being in the presence of danger [28]; whereas, mass panic implies uncontrollable flight, affiliation implies moving toward the familiar.

According to the social attachment model, there are four reactions to threats or disasters depending upon the social support available (Present vs. Absent), as well as the perceived degree of physical danger (Mild/Anxiety vs. Severe/Terror) [28]. Increased attachment (i.e., affiliation) occurs in situations where the level of physical danger is low, but causes anxiety, and attachment figures are present; however, if these attachment figures are not present, orderly flight or evacuation is likely to occur. That is to say, individuals without social support are more likely to flee a situation in search of familiar figures (i.e., fly home to parents) compared to the local residents within that community [28]. However, when the danger is high causing intense fear, individuals with familiar support are more likely to flee together as a group but again mass panic is unlikely. Finally, mass panic is most likely to occur in situations where the danger level is high and the individuals lack social support [28].

The University of Alabama's Authur Pendragon threat resulted in a low intensity "flight-and-affiliation" reaction. During the week of September 22$^{nd}$, class attendance dropped, and there were reports of students traveling home to their families because they felt unsafe. In addition, many on-campus residents moved in with off-campus residents due to the perceived threat. In this way, the Authur Pendragon case appears to have resulted in increased attachment for those students with a strong, local support system, whereas those students who lacked familiar support were more likely to travel home in search of attachment figures. Although the authors are unable to ascertain which students left campus during that week, anecdotes suggest that the new freshman class and out-of-state students were more likely to travel home compared to the upperclassmen or in-state students.

Research also suggests that proximity plays a role in the way that people perceive risk and dread [31], and how they communicate information during crises [32]. Proximity to an event changes the way in which the credibility of information is processed and perceived – with those further from a risky situation/threat believing the likelihood or harm to be greater. Distance from a crisis can also alter whether someone is more likely to seek information or provide information to others. Although a negative relationship between proximity and credibility seems counterintuitive, the findings of previous research [31] may explain why some UA students fled campus. That is to say, parents of out-of-state students were more likely to label a cyber threat as real, and in response, they were more likely to encourage and enable their children to come home. However, students with families closer to campus were more likely to practice a realistic appraisal (i.e., lower perception of threat) of the events taking place on campus. Overall, the theories of proximity and social attachment appear to explain the "flight-affiliation" response by students at UA. In addition, there was no evidence of mass panic or uncontrollable flight; although, it may be argued that mass anxiety occurred thanks to the explosion of rumors on social media.

Rumors are unconfirmed or unverified information passed from one person to another, and in situations where there is ambiguity, rumors fill in that missing information [33]. Since it takes time to confirm the likelihood or existence of a threat, terror situations "provide a fertile ground for rumors if individuals do not receive the facts they desire" [34]. Researchers found that users of social media rely on recency of updates/posts for establishing credibility of messages [35]. There was a lack of trust by the students since the institution was slow to provide credible information – this lack of

trust facilitated the student's reliance on social media. Research indicates that people are more likely to believe rumors when there is a lack of trust in an organization [25]. Thus, the fact that UA did not release a formal statement until 12 h after the initial Tutwiler dorm lockdown and the Authur Pendragon threat, this likely led to a substantial distrust by students, which facilitated rumor mongering.

As members of the campus community, the authors can also confidently report that the lack of credible information and slow response time by the institution led to an increase in distrust of the school by the students. In addition, rumors are more likely to be retransmitted when they are attractive (e.g., contains visuals) or sent by credible sources (e.g., popular news media, local service) [34]. The Tutwiler lockdown occurred approximately 9:30 pm and by 9:44 pm UA's student newspaper, the Crimson White, published a story online: "UAPD investigations death threat at Tutwiler Hall" [9]. This story included photos of UAPD officers and vehicles at Tutwiler during the lockdown (see Fig. 3). Also, students shared photos of themselves barricaded in their dorm rooms and bathrooms, some holding hands, which may have further facilitated rumor mongering (see Fig. 4).

**Fig. 3.** UAPD officers outside of Tutwiler Hall during lockdown on September 21, 2014

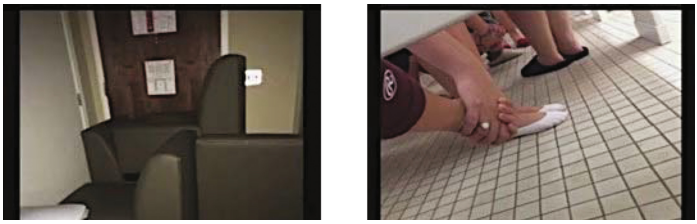


**Fig. 4.** UA students shared photos via social media during the Tutwiler lockdown. Retrieved from www.reblop.com

Finally, the rumors were easily retransmitted through the use of text messaging and social media, including Facebook, GroupMe, and Twitter, and these sources may be deemed credible if the message is sent by someone you know and trust. For instance, the sender may retransmit a message sent by someone else by taking a screen-shot of

the original message. So, rather than saying "a friend told me this", the sender takes a screen shot and transmits the original message, which may suggest that this information is more than just a rumor. Traditional mass media has been referred to as the "oxygen" of terrorism [36]; however, following this analogy, social media is the uncontrollable catalyst – especially when apps, such as Yik Yak, facilitate anonymous posts, and propagate rumors and the flow of invalidated communications.

## 4 Practical Recommendations for Managing Cyber Threats and Rumors

Hindsight bias naturally gives people this feeling that, when looking back on a situation, the consequences or outcomes could, and should, have been predicted [37]. In addition, people are "cursed with knowledge," meaning we are unable to perceive the past from our original viewpoint, which lacked foresight [38]. Thus, it is always challenging to provide constructive recommendations due to these naturally occurring biases; however, keeping these biases in mind, the authors have carefully identified several productive recommendations for university administers as well as law enforcement.

First, new information and communication technologies have taken the place of traditional ways that people share information (e.g., social media vs. telephone hotlines). Various social media apps and platforms were utilized by the students at The University of Alabama campus (e.g., Yik Yak, Twitter, GroupMe, Reddit); however, the University administration and law enforcement provided information to students via official emails. Thus, students were receiving information quicker by social media channels, so it would benefit law enforcement to screen social media, which would facilitate earlier detection of crises and rumor mongering. By identifying the rumors earlier, formal responses could be sent containing accurate information via the same social media channels [39]. It is important for administrators and law enforcement to communicate with the public using the same channels they are receiving their information.

Second, the speed of information that is provided to people during crisis is vital. After reviewing the events that took place, it is fair to claim that the mass media, the campus police, and university administrators were slow to provide information about the specific details that led to the lockdown of the dormitory. Westerman et al. found that recency of social media updates was an integral variable in raising the credibility of information [35]. It is not clear why there was a lack of trust and credibility despite the updates provided via the school's homepage, emails, and pre-recorded voicemails; it may be the fact that the University did not address the threats and rumors until 12 h after the lockdown. By this time, social media had already exploded with rumors. However, when UAPD did formally address the rumors in an email sent Monday, September 22$^{nd}$ at 5:10 pm, it did appear to reduce many of the myths circulating campus. Thus, providing information immediately, even if it is simply acknowledging that law enforcement and the University are aware of the situation, may be just enough to maintain the public's trust [24]. According to Breckenridge and Zimbardo [25], the

"public must have ready access to accurate information concerning threat assessment and preparedness as well as to developments and protective governmental responses" (p. 128).

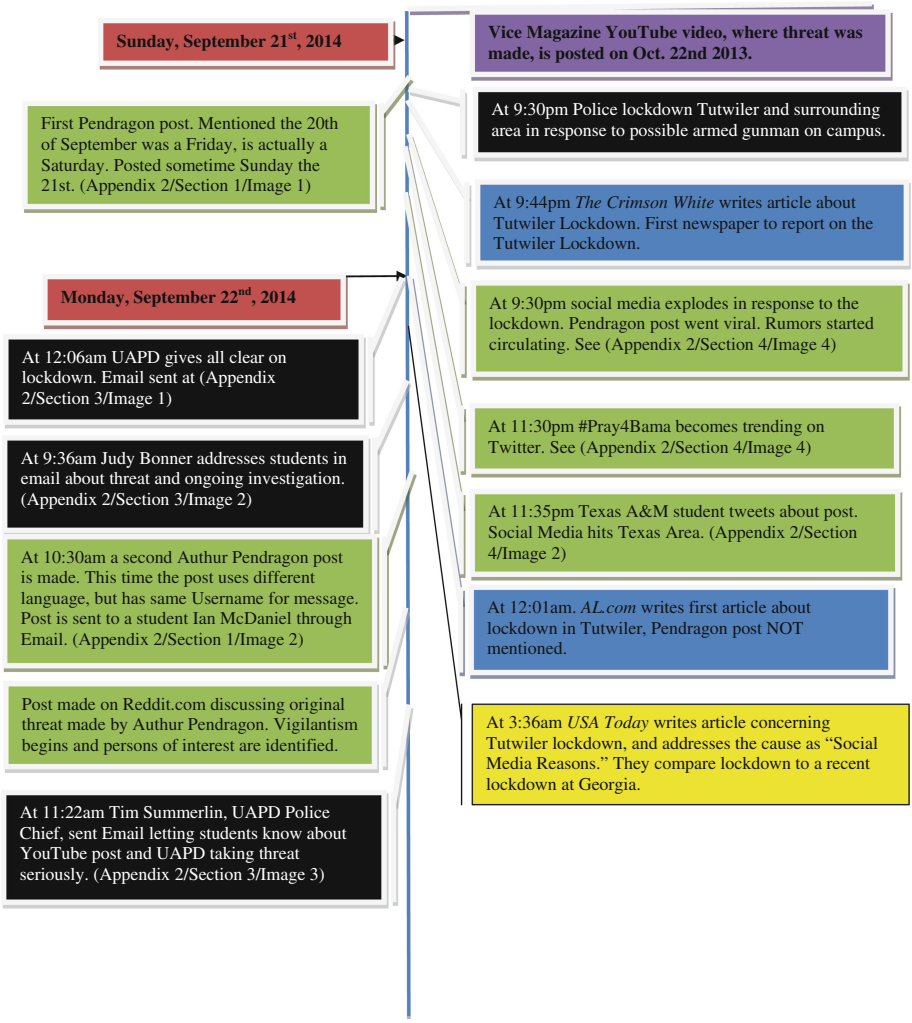
Finally, institutions should immediately share information about the legal consequences for creating threats, rumors, and potential panic. Based on this case study, the potential for students to "cry wolf" or create pranks is high, as is evidence from the numerous rumors on social media and the two students arrested. Thus, university officials and law enforcement should pre-develop guidelines of communication for faculty, staff, students, and other administrators during a cyber threat or campus crisis situation. For instance, on Tuesday, September 23rd, a UA Dean notified faculty at 9:28 am that students were expected to attend class; however, the Provost directly emailed the students at 5:35 pm stating that they would not be penalized for missing class the rest of the week. In addition, the authors can anecdotally report that students were suspicious of faculty members who cancelled class during that week; specifically, there were rumors that the faculty members who cancelled class had privileged or inside information on the threats. Overall, having guidelines or protocols in place will strengthen trust in the institution because faculty and administrators will have a cohesive message for students.

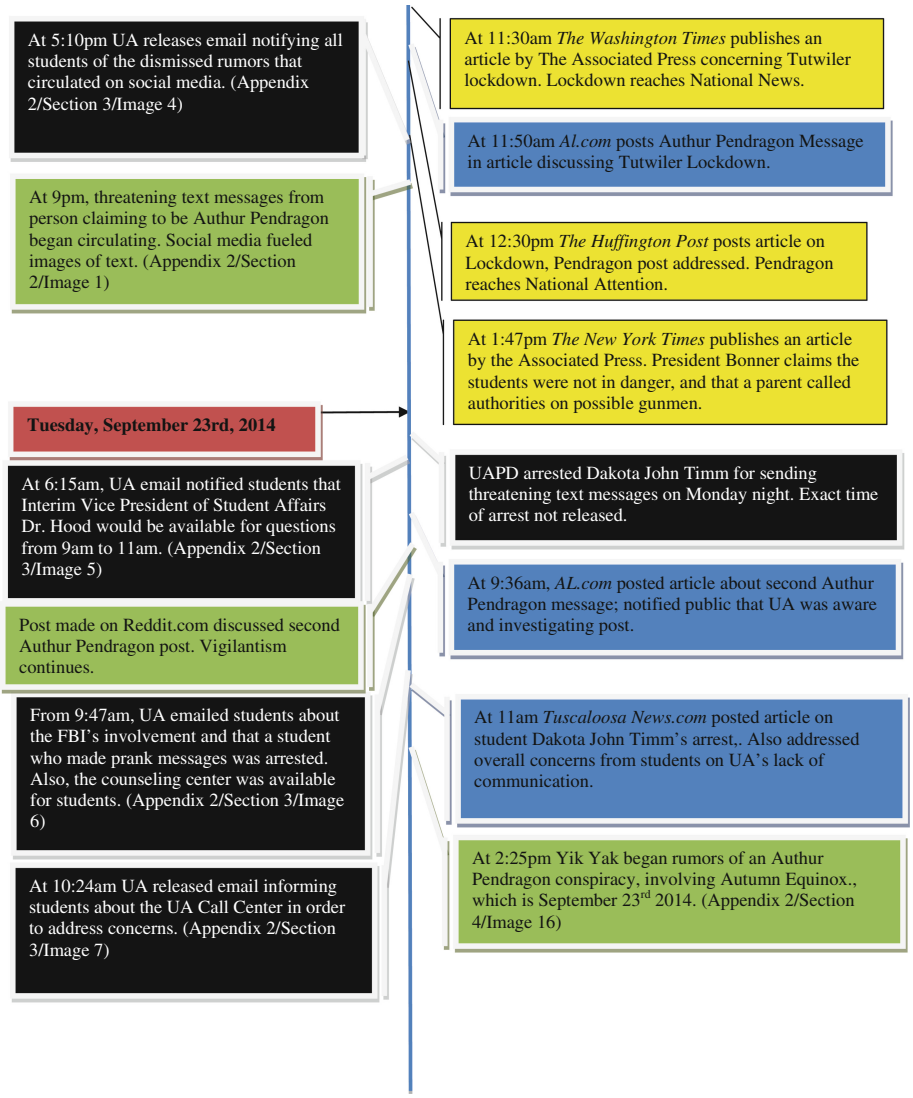
## 5 Future Research Recommendation

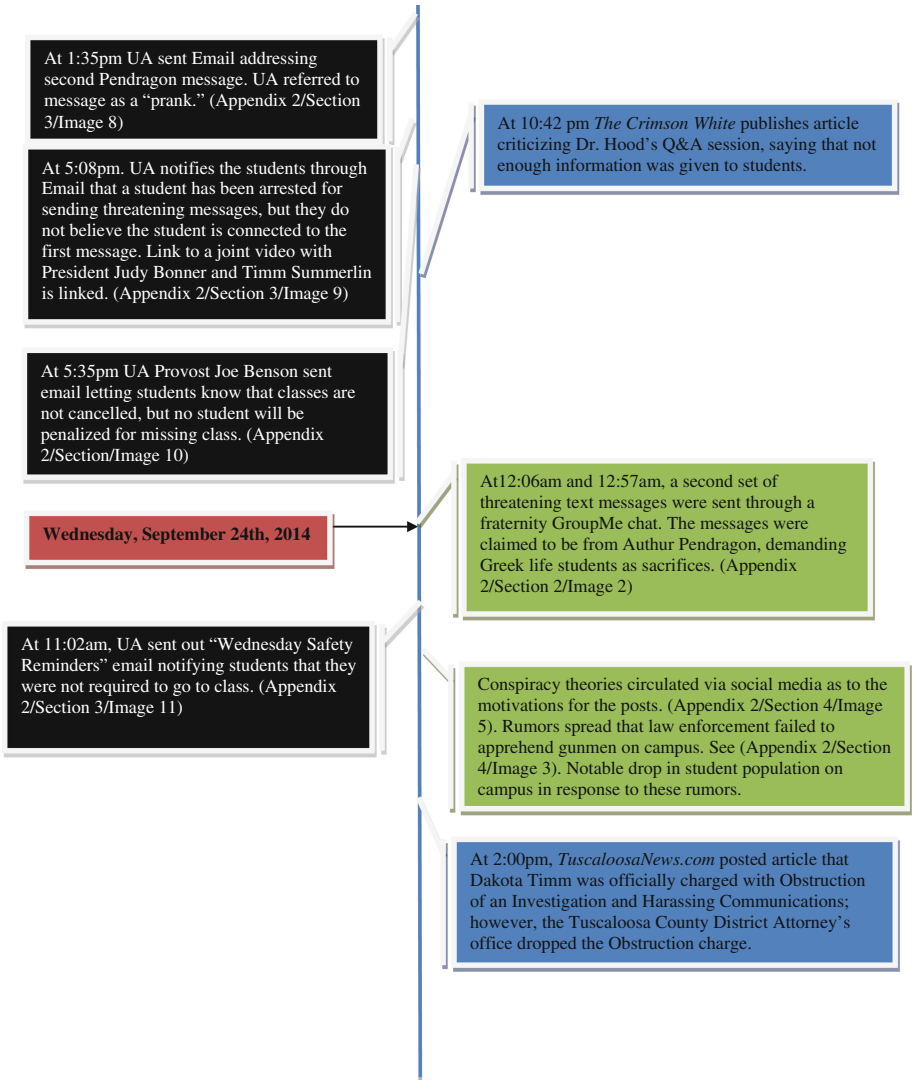
Ironically, one of the authors was in the process of developing an institutional review board proposal at UA to hold focus groups about what students expect from the university and police in the event of a crisis. However, this study was abandoned as a result of the cyber threat since it became evident that students desired a prompt and consistent flow of information. Future researchers should develop institutional review board proposals on public responses to cyber threats before they begin. This tactic of preemptive data collection will be challenging, but initiating proposals before a crisis occurs will allow researchers to test theories, models, and obtain participant data more accurately – thereby removing hindsight bias and "curse of knowledge". After all, students will most likely be eager to share their personal experience during and following a cyber threat.

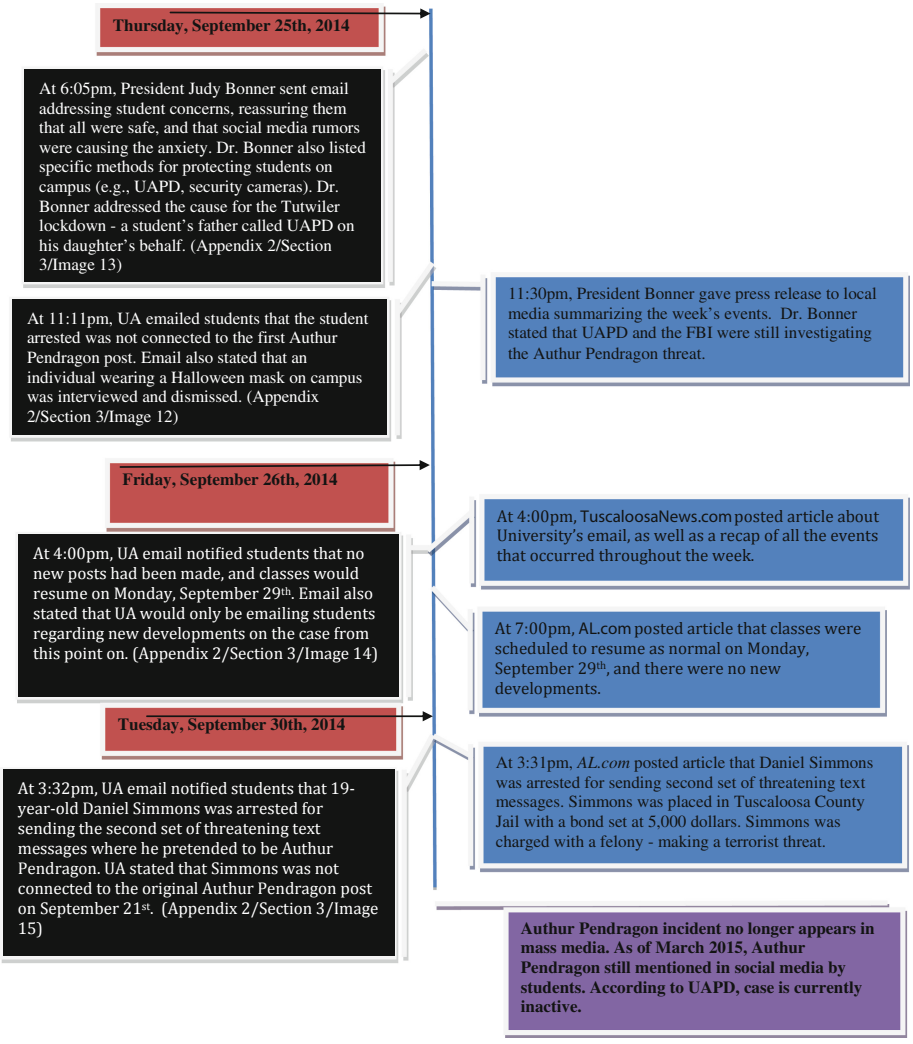
In conclusion, the theoretical perspectives and recommendations in this manuscript are based on the authors' first hand observations as members of The University of Alabama. However, these were anecdotal observations rather than empirical data since crises are naturally unexpected events. Future researchers should be prepared to test theories regarding the best way to transmit credible information to a community during a perceived act of cyberterrorism.

# Appendix 1: Visual Timeline of Cyber Threat and Communications




At 5:10pm UA releases email notifying all students of the dismissed rumors that circulated on social media. (Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 4)
At 9pm, threatening text messages from person claiming to be Authur Pendragon began circulating. Social media fueled images of text. (Appendix 2/Section 2/Image 1)
At 11:30am *The Washington Times* publishes an article by The Associated Press concerning Tutwiler lockdown. Lockdown reaches National News.
At 11:50am *AL.com* posts Authur Pendragon Message in article discussing Tutwiler Lockdown.
At 12:30pm *The Huffington Post* posts article on Lockdown, Pendragon post addressed. Pendragon reaches National Attention.
At 1:47pm *The New York Times* publishes an article by the Associated Press. President Bonner claims the students were not in danger, and that a parent called authorities on possible gunmen.
**Tuesday, September 23rd, 2014**
At 6:15am, UA email notified students that Interim Vice President of Student Affairs Dr. Hood would be available for questions from 9am to 11am. (Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 5)
UAPD arrested Dakota John Timm for sending threatening text messages on Monday night. Exact time of arrest not released.
At 9:36am, *AL.com* posted article about second Authur Pendragon message; notified public that UA was aware and investigating post.
Post made on Reddit.com discussed second Authur Pendragon post. Vigilantism continues.
From 9:47am, UA emailed students about the FBI's involvement and that a student who made prank messages was arrested. Also, the counseling center was available for students. (Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 6)
At 11am *Tuscaloosa News.com* posted article on student Dakota John Timm's arrest,. Also addressed overall concerns from students on UA's lack of communication.
At 10:24am UA released email informing students about the UA Call Center in order to address concerns. (Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 7)
At 2:25pm Yik Yak began rumors of an Authur Pendragon conspiracy, involving Autumn Equinox., which is September 23rd 2014. (Appendix 2/Section 4/Image 16)


At 1:35pm UA sent Email addressing second Pendragon message. UA referred to message as a "prank." (Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 8)
At 5:08pm. UA notifies the students through Email that a student has been arrested for sending threatening messages, but they do not believe the student is connected to the first message. Link to a joint video with President Judy Bonner and Timm Summerlin is linked. (Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 9)
At 5:35pm UA Provost Joe Benson sent email letting students know that classes are not cancelled, but no student will be penalized for missing class. (Appendix 2/Section/Image 10)
Wednesday, September 24th, 2014
At 11:02am, UA sent out "Wednesday Safety Reminders" email notifying students that they were not required to go to class. (Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 11)
At 10:42 pm The Crimson White publishes article criticizing Dr. Hood's Q&A session, saying that not enough information was given to students.
At12:06am and 12:57am, a second set of threatening text messages were sent through a fraternity GroupMe chat. The messages were claimed to be from Authur Pendragon, demanding Greek life students as sacrifices. (Appendix 2/Section 2/Image 2)
Conspiracy theories circulated via social media as to the motivations for the posts. (Appendix 2/Section 4/Image 5). Rumors spread that law enforcement failed to apprehend gunmen on campus. See (Appendix 2/Section 4/Image 3). Notable drop in student population on campus in response to these rumors.
At 2:00pm, TuscaloosaNews.com posted article that Dakota Timm was officially charged with Obstruction of an Investigation and Harassing Communications; however, the Tuscaloosa County District Attorney's office dropped the Obstruction charge.


Thursday, September 25th, 2014
At 6:05pm, President Judy Bonner sent email addressing student concerns, reassuring them that all were safe, and that social media rumors were causing the anxiety. Dr. Bonner also listed specific methods for protecting students on campus (e.g., UAPD, security cameras). Dr. Bonner addressed the cause for the Tutwiler lockdown - a student's father called UAPD on his daughter's behalf. (Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 13)
11:30pm, President Bonner gave press release to local media summarizing the week's events. Dr. Bonner stated that UAPD and the FBI were still investigating the Authur Pendragon threat.
At 11:11pm, UA emailed students that the student arrested was not connected to the first Authur Pendragon post. Email also stated that an individual wearing a Halloween mask on campus was interviewed and dismissed. (Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 12)
Friday, September 26th, 2014
At 4:00pm, TuscaloosaNews.com posted article about University's email, as well as a recap of all the events that occurred throughout the week.
At 4:00pm, UA email notified students that no new posts had been made, and classes would resume on Monday, September 29th. Email also stated that UA would only be emailing students regarding new developments on the case from this point on. (Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 14)
At 7:00pm, AL.com posted article that classes were scheduled to resume as normal on Monday, September 29th, and there were no new developments.
Tuesday, September 30th, 2014
At 3:31pm, AL.com posted article that Daniel Simmons was arrested for sending second set of threatening text messages. Simmons was placed in Tuscaloosa County Jail with a bond set at 5,000 dollars. Simmons was charged with a felony - making a terrorist threat.
At 3:32pm, UA email notified students that 19-year-old Daniel Simmons was arrested for sending the second set of threatening text messages where he pretended to be Authur Pendragon. UA stated that Simmons was not connected to the original Authur Pendragon post on September 21st. (Appendix 2/Section 3/Image 15)
Authur Pendragon incident no longer appears in mass media. As of March 2015, Authur Pendragon still mentioned in social media by students. According to UAPD, case is currently inactive.

# Appendix 2: Collection of Pendragon Threats and Related Texts

## Section 1 Pendragon Threats

Image 1: Original Threat

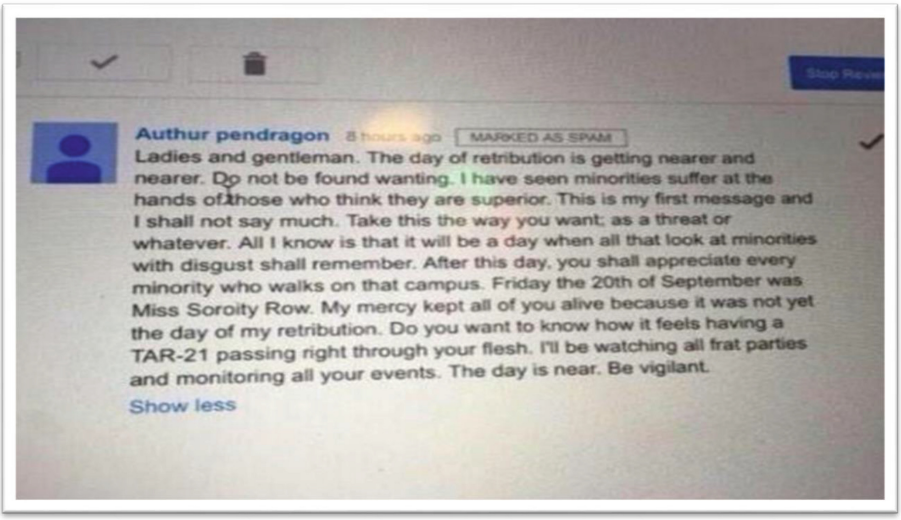
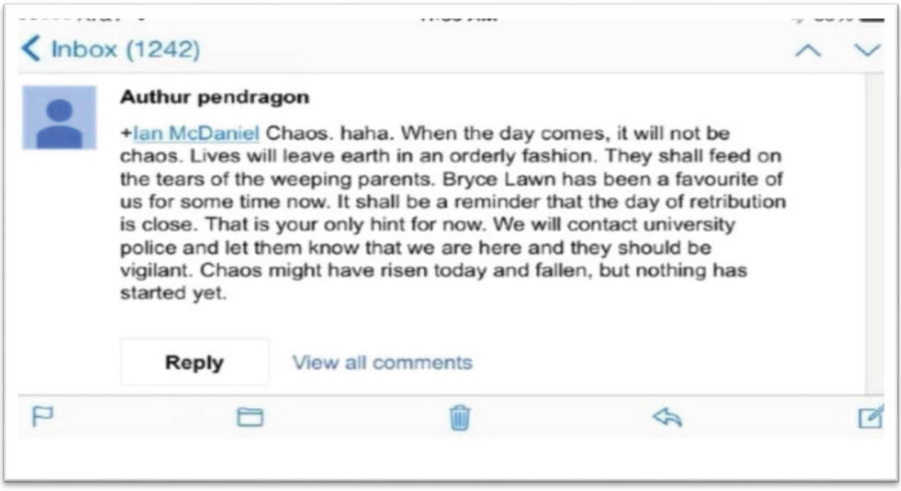



Image 2: Second Threat



## Section 2 Cell Phone Threats

Image 1: 1st Anonymous Cell Phone Threat

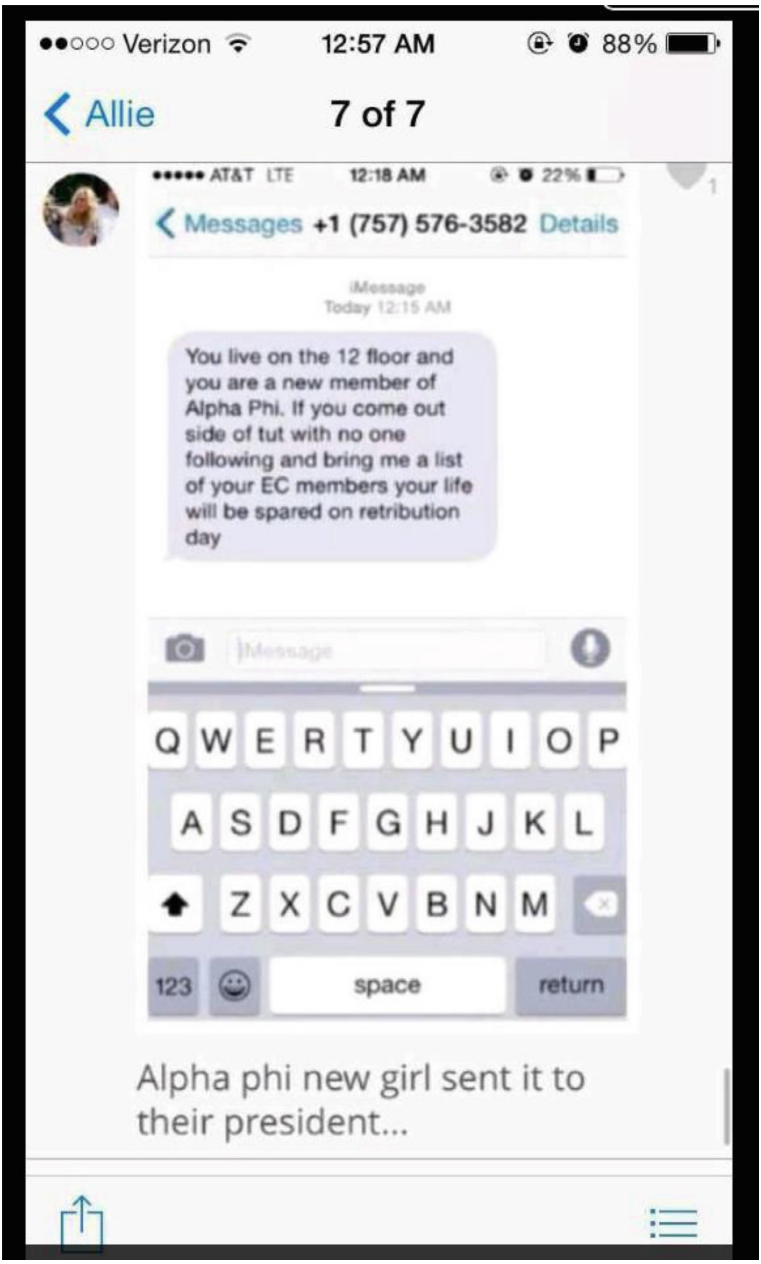
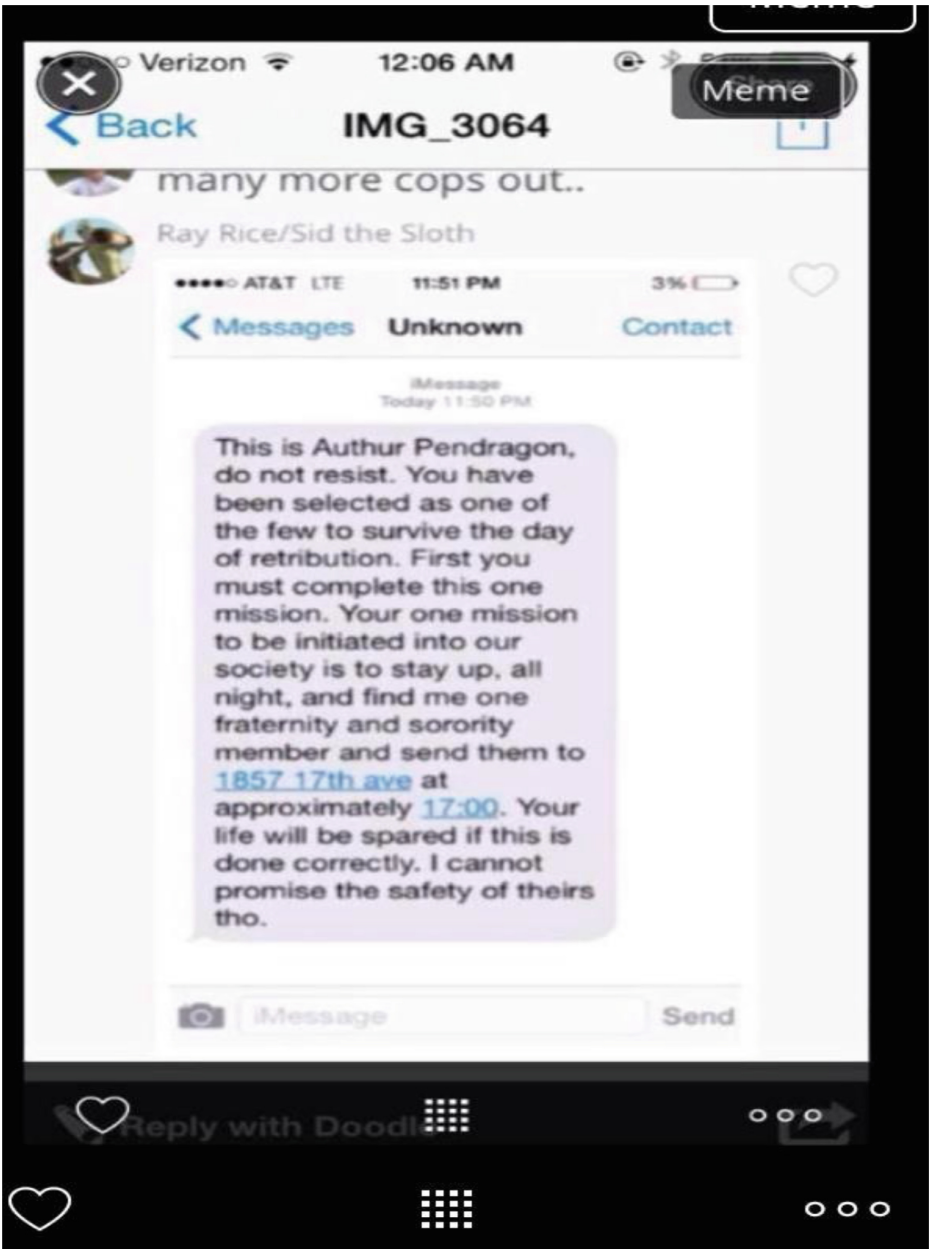


Image 2: 2nd Anonymous Cellphone threat



## Section 3 University of Alabama Emails

Image 1

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Mon, Sep 22, 2014 at 12:06 AM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

UAPD responded to reports of individuals with firearms at Tutwiler. Officers thoroughly searched the building and no weapons or unauthorized persons were found. The information that was provided to UAPD and other law enforcement agencies was based on rumors and social media posts and not actual witness accounts. UAPD will continue to investigate the situation to determine where the posts originated.

Image 2

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Mon, Sep 22, 2014 at 9:36 AM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

Last night, The University of Alabama received an unconfirmed report of armed individuals in the vicinity of Tutwiler. The information was sent to UAPD from an external law enforcement agency who had been contacted by a parent whose daughter had heard it from multiple other students who had seen social media posts. No eye-witness or firsthand knowledge of the alleged threat was reported to UAPD or any law enforcement agency.

UAPD responded to Tutwiler within 1 minute of receiving the information, and promptly confirmed that reports of armed individuals were not accurate. However, in an abundance of caution, UAPD conducted a thorough search of Tutwiler.

Residents of Tutwiler were asked to stay in their rooms while the search was conducted. Due to the size of Tutwiler and the thoroughness of the officers' search, this process took about 45 minutes. No weapons or unauthorized individuals were found in Tutwiler or in the vicinity. Students were never in danger.

I can assure you that UA will always respond quickly and notify the campus community when you need to take immediate action. In this case, no one was in danger and immediate action was not required.

We understand that the time it took to be cautious was concerning to students and their parents, faculty and staff, and I want to reiterate that we will always put your safety and security first. UAPD will continue to investigate the situation.

Judy Bonner

President

Image 3

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Mon, Sep 22, 2014 at 11:20 AM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

Many of you know that an alarming comment was posted on a YouTube recruitment video over the weekend. While we have no credible information at this point to determine whether this is a legitimate threat, The University of Alabama is taking this situation very seriously. Posting a terrorist threat is a crime and will be treated as such. UAPD is aggressively investigating to identify the individual(s) involved. Among other things, we have requested search warrants and are consulting with the FBI.

This comment appears to have been the catalyst for the incident last night at Tutwiler. And the ongoing social media conversation continues to fuel rumors and speculation and generate additional inaccuracies.

I can assure you that your safety is our top priority. I encourage you to continue to go about your normal routine. If you see something suspicious, please contact UAPD immediately at 205-348-5454.

Tim Summerlin

Chief of Police

The University of Alabama

Image 4

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Mon, Sep 22, 2014 at 5:10 PM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

Please see the update below on the events of the last 18 hours regarding safety issues on and off campus.

- UAPD has issued search warrants to social media sites regarding the YouTube comments. Officers continue to process and follow-up with new information and tips that have been provided.
- Based on the information that has been evaluated to this point, classes will continue as scheduled and UA will maintain normal operations. Faculty members are encouraged to work with students who present specific or unique concerns.
- The student in the advisory sent earlier this afternoon about the off-campus incident admitted to investigators that the incident she described did not occur. The investigation into this case has been closed.
- The fire alarm in Presidential Village was due to sensor that was activated by a non-fire event.
- There was no machete with a note on the door of a fraternity.
- No shots were fired at Presidential Village.
- The FBI is not on campus, and did not conduct a raid in Paty Hall.
- No one dressed as the Joker was in Tutwiler or on sorority row.
- There was not a man on sorority row with a box tied to him in a threatening manner.
- No one was shot and no one has been arrested.
- No students were choked on the Quad or anywhere else.

Students who have concerns about their safety are encouraged to go to myBama and to sign up for Rave Guardian, an app that will immediately alert UAPD if a student becomes concerned about his/her safety.

Additional information about safety can be found in the Safer Living Guide at http://police.ua.edu/slg.html.

Image 5

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Tue, Sep 23, 2014 at 6:15 AM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

Dr. Steven Hood, interim vice president of Student Affairs, and UAPD officers will be available in the living room of Tutwiler Hall on Tuesday, Sept. 23, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. for students who have concerns and questions.

Image 6

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Tue, Sep 23, 2014 at 9:47 AM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

The guiding principle at The University of Alabama is to promote the personal safety of students, faculty and staff, and UAPD continues to investigate and has been in contact with the FBI in identifying sources of the postings.

Overnight, UAPD responded to messages sent to UA students that proved to be false. UAPD was able to identify a student who sent one of the prank messages.

Although the ongoing social media conversation continues to fuel rumors and speculation and generate additional inaccuracies, the campus community is encouraged to continue its normal routine. Classes will continue as scheduled and UA will maintain normal operations. Faculty members should work with students who present concerns or fears related to these incidents.

Students who need to talk with someone should contact The UA Counseling Center at 1000 South Lawn Office Building (1101 Jackson Avenue). The Center is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Tuesday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The center may be reached at 205-348-3863.

Students who have concerns about their safety are encouraged to go to myBama and to sign up for Rave Guardian, an app that will immediately alert UAPD if a student becomes concerned about his/her safety. Additional information about safety can be found in the Safer Living Guide at http://police.ua.edu/slg.html.

Any suspicious activity should be reported to UAPD immediately at 205-348-5454.

Image 7

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Tue, Sep 23, 2014 at 10:24 AM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

Parents and students who have questions about recent events on the UA campus may contact the UA Call Center at 205348-1001 and 877-408-1001.

Image 8

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Tue, Sep 23, 2014 at 1:35 PM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

Despite ongoing rumors on social media, no new prank messages concerning The University of Alabama have been posted since Monday, Sept. 22, at 10:30 a.m.

Student well-being remains a high priority, and UA Provost Joe Benson has asked all faculty to work with students who have specific or unique concerns.

Parents and students are urged to continue to check the UA website and UA Facebook and Twitter pages for accurate and up-to-date information.

Also, the UA Call Center remains open. However, the volume of calls is currently high. Parents and students who have not been able to get through are asked to please keep calling 205-348-1001 or 877-408-1001. Your calls are important to us.

Image 9

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Tue, Sep 23, 2014 at 5:08 PM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

A 20-year-old UA student has been arrested and charged with obstructing governmental operations following an alarming message that was sent Monday night, Sept. 22. He was placed in the Tuscaloosa County Jail on a $2500 bond.

This message is not believed to be directly connected with the initial intimidating post that was sent on Sunday night, Sept. 21.

The investigation into the Sunday night post is active and ongoing, and the full force of the University's investigative resources are being directed toward it. Two search warrants have been issued and additional search warrants are being sought. Investigators continue to actively follow up on tips, leads and information.

UAPD is working collaboratively with state and federal partners, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to garner additional information about these posts and to identify the individual or individuals who posted them.

To view a video of UA President Judy Bonner and UAPD Chief Tim Summerlin discussing this situation, click here: https://vimeo.com/106982472.

Image 10

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Tue, Sep 23, 2014 at 5:35 PM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

The University of Alabama continues to deal with a good bit of misinformation regarding the operation of the institution. This is to make it clear that the University will continue to operate as usual. All classes will meet as scheduled. Any student who is uncomfortable attending class will not be penalized, but will have to make up work missed.

The Call Center will close Tuesday at 6 p.m. CST and open again at 8 a.m. CST on Wednesday. Updated and accurate information can be found at UA.EDU.

Joe Benson

Provost

Image 11

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Wed, Sep 24, 2014 at 11:02 AM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

Please see the information below regarding safety issues on campus.

- The University will continue to operate as usual. All classes will meet as scheduled. Any student who is uncomfortable attending class will not be penalized, but will have to make up work missed.
- The Call Center is open until 5 p.m. CST today. To reach the Call Center, dial 205-348-1001 or 877-408-1001.
- Students who have concerns about their safety are encouraged to go to myBama and to sign up for Rave Guardian, an app that will immediately alert UAPD if a student becomes concerned about his/her safety.
- Additional information about safety can be found in the Safer Living Guide at http://police.ua.edu/slg.html.
- Students who need to talk with someone should contact The UA Counseling Center at 1000 South Lawn Office Building (1101 Jackson Avenue). The Center is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Tuesday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The center may be reached at 205-348-3863.

Image 12

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Thu, Sep 25, 2014 at 6:05 PM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

As we near the end of a very stressful week, our campus is getting back to normal. There were no new threats overnight, and we continue to pursue the identity of the individual(s) who posted the original intimidating message as aggressively today as we did when it was posted last weekend. We will continue our efforts until a resolution is achieved.

Please know that many investigative actions are occurring behind the scenes and are not visible to the general community. To protect the integrity of the investigation, specific details will not be released, since doing so could compromise the ongoing case. Investigators have spent countless hours collecting, vetting, and following up on tips, leads and information, and the social media companies involved are cooperating with UAPD on this matter. We are taking these posts with the utmost seriousness. We are collaborating with state and federal partners and are working to make sure students are reassured with a strong uniformed presence.

Through the years, we have added additional sworn officers to the University of Alabama Police Department. UAPD now has 76 sworn officers and 17 key staff. Four additional officers are currently in training. We also have a force of 49 uniformed security assistants who provide a physical presence on campus, extending the eyes and ears of the police department.

In addition to trained personnel, UA has strategically located surveillance cameras around campus. Through our internal and external PA system, our University Relations staff and UAPD can send announcements to specific buildings, to a group of buildings, to every building on campus and across the entire campus outside.

The reality is that information can now be sent via social media to hundreds of thousands of people instantly. That is what happened on Sunday evening and, because of the panic that instantly ensued, a student in Tutwiler called her dad in

Birmingham and told him that people dressed as clowns had entered Tutwiler Hall with guns. UAPD was notified at this point and responded within one minute to Tutwiler. Once UAPD had determined that this information was not true, they were able to talk directly with the student. She indicated that she saw something on social media that made her think that this had happened.

Unfortunately, the next 24 hours were full of the same type of rapidly spreading rumors and speculation. One rumor was followed by another rumor and, in the end, none of the rumors were substantiated. For our students and especially for the parents of our students, the original social media post and the subsequent flurry of rumors that circulated via social media created grave concern. I fully understand and I share the anxiety this generated.

Since Sunday evening, UA's Emergency Preparedness and Response Policy Group has met continuously to proactively manage the University's response. University Relations has communicated regularly with students, parents and the University of Alabama community. We set up a call center so parents and others could obtain information. Our interim vice president of Student Affairs and two UAPD officers met with students at Tutwiler to try to answer their questions. And, Student Affairs staff met with a variety of student groups to do the same thing. Residence hall assistants have been checking on students and helping address their concerns. The Provost's office continues to work with deans and faculty to ensure that faculty are providing support and are working with students. The president of our Faculty Senate sent an email to the faculty asking them to support students and help them use this as a learning experience.

I want to encourage students who are concerned about their safety to go to myBama and sign up for Rave Guardian, an app that will immediately alert UAPD if a student becomes concerned about his/her safety. Additional information about safety can be found in the Safer Living Guide at http://www.police.ua.edu/images/saferlivingguide.pdf.

Also, students can call the University Police directly at 205-348-5454 if they have any information pertaining to this case or during an emergency situation.

Please be assured that the safety of our community is our top priority, and we will continue to work diligently to preserve it. Thank you for your care and concern and for being a partner with us as we all work together to achieve this imperative.

Judy Bonner

Image 13

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Thu, Sep 25, 2014 at 11:11 PM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

Despite rumors currently circulating on social media, no arrests have been made in the initial social media post investigation. The individual whose photo appears on the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office website is not connected to UAPD's investigation.

Earlier this evening, in an unrelated matter, UAPD talked to an individual who was seen wearing a Halloween mask. After interviewing this person, officers determined that the individual had no ill intent.

Image 14

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Fri, Sep 26, 2014 at 4:00 PM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

No new messages have been posted since Monday morning, Sept. 22. UAPD continues to aggressively investigate the original social media post.

All classes will continue as scheduled on Monday, Sept. 29. Students who missed class this week should work with their professors to make up missed work.

During the month of September, at least a dozen colleges and universities across the nation have experienced a threatening message posted on social media. While none of the threats have been credible, they have caused significant panic and uncertainty on each campus.

After today, the University will send updates only when there is new information to report. Individuals who become aware of suspicious behavior should immediately contact UAPD. In an attempt to help the campus return to normal and reduce the stresses that come from inaccurate information, we also ask all students, parents and employees to refrain from sharing rumors and speculation.

Image 15

uanews <uanews@advance.ua.edu> Tue, Sep 30, 2014 at 3:22 PM

To: STUDENTNEWS@listserv.ua.edu

Daniel Evan Simmons, a 19-year-old University of Alabama student, has been arrested by UAPD and charged with making a terrorist threat. The arrest is the result of further investigation into the additional alarming messages that were sent during the early morning hours of Tuesday, Sept. 23. This message is not believed to be directly connected with the initial intimidating post that was sent on Sunday night, Sept. 21. Simmons has been placed in the Tuscaloosa County Jail on a $5,000.00 bond and has been issued an interim suspension by UA. UAPD continues to investigate the original post.

## Section 4: Social Media Posts

Image 1: Crimson White First Tweet

User Actions

Following

**The Crimson White** @TheCrimsonWhite

BREAKING: Police have a perimeter set up outside of Tutwiler dorm following anonymous threats of gun violence.

Reply
Retweet
Favorite
More

Image 2: Texas A&M student tweet

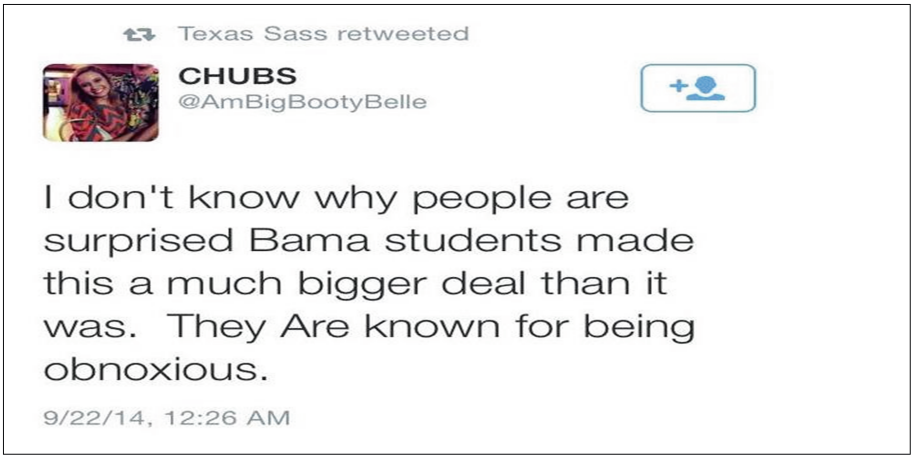



Image 3: GroupMe social media screenshot post

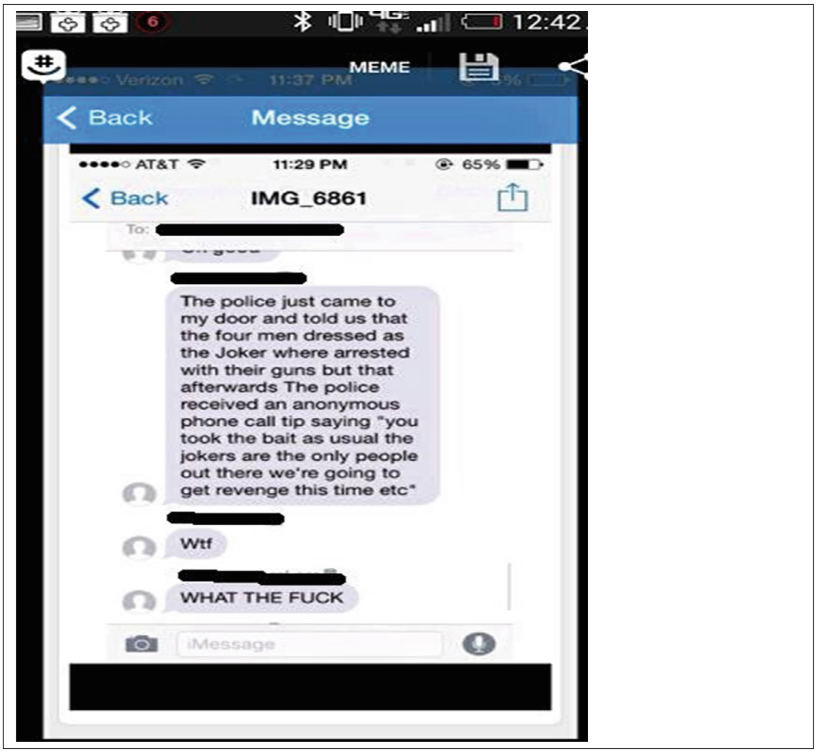


Image 4: #Pray4bama Trending on twitter

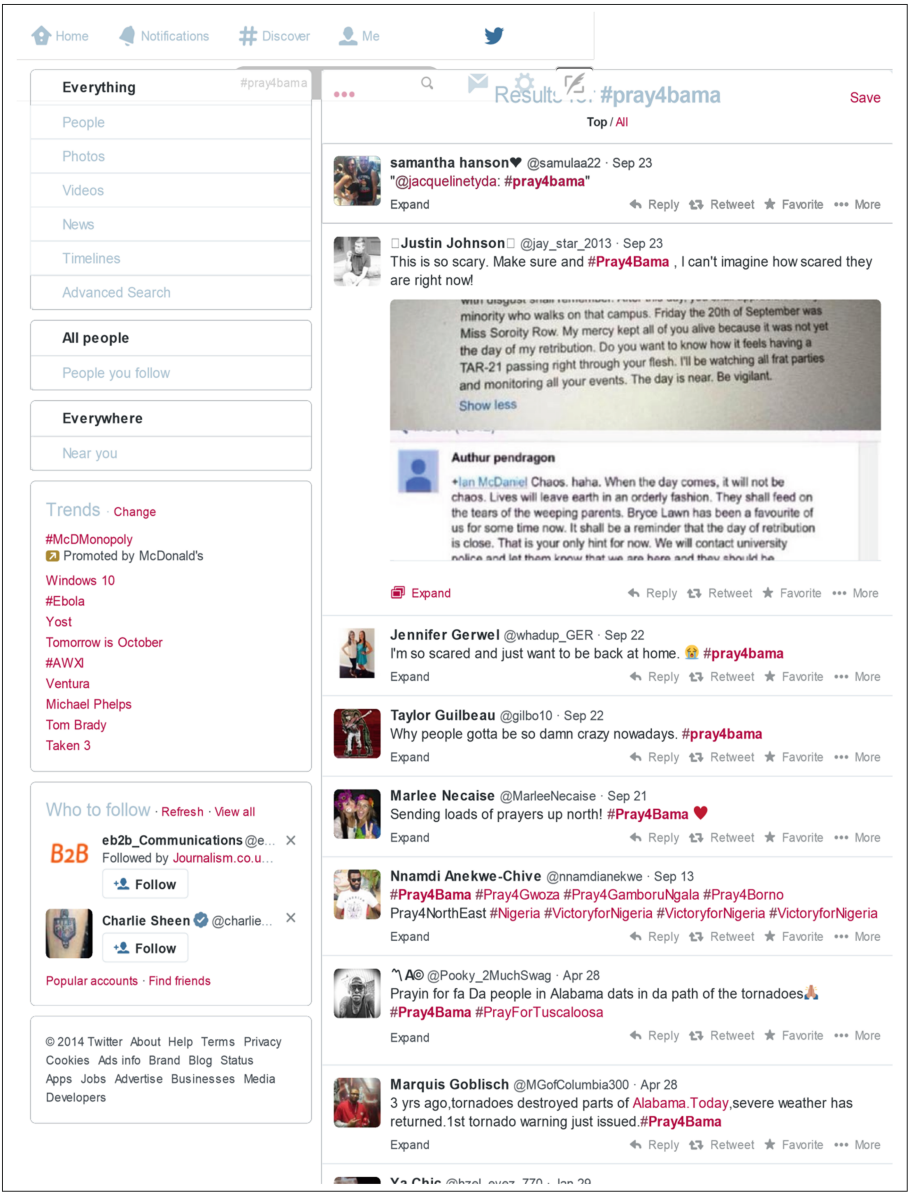


Image 4 Cont

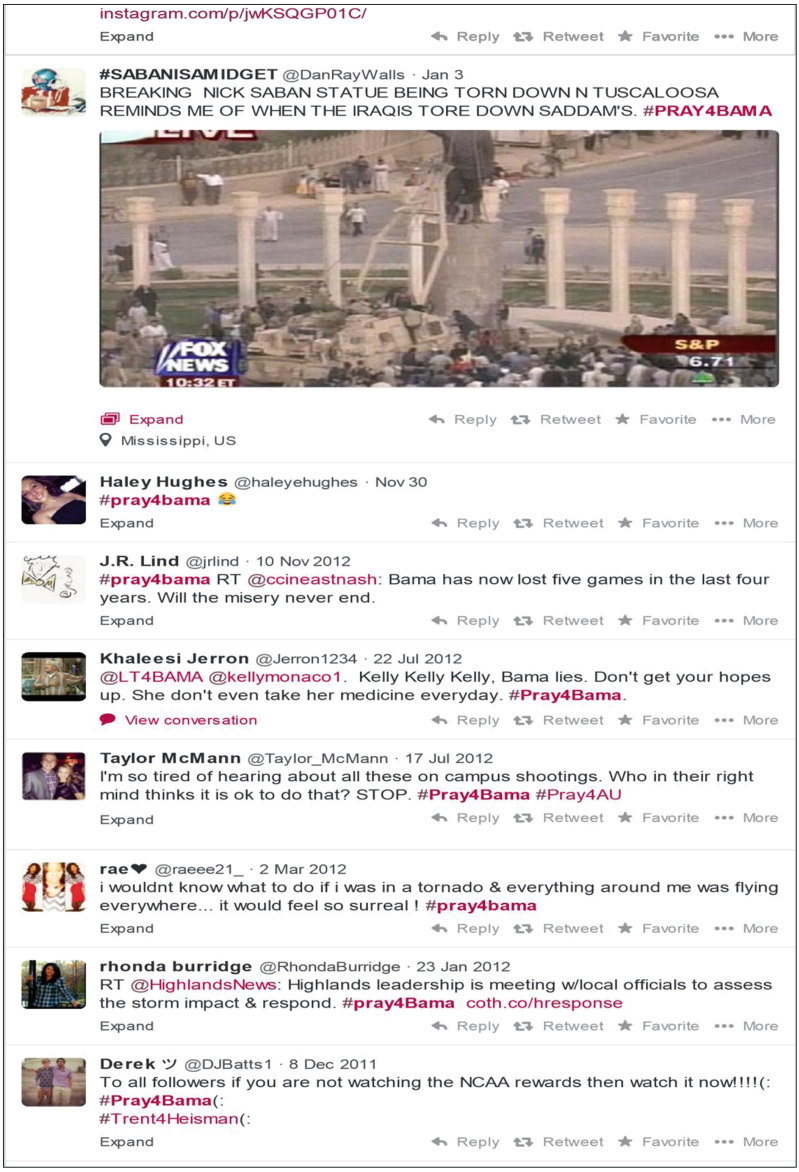
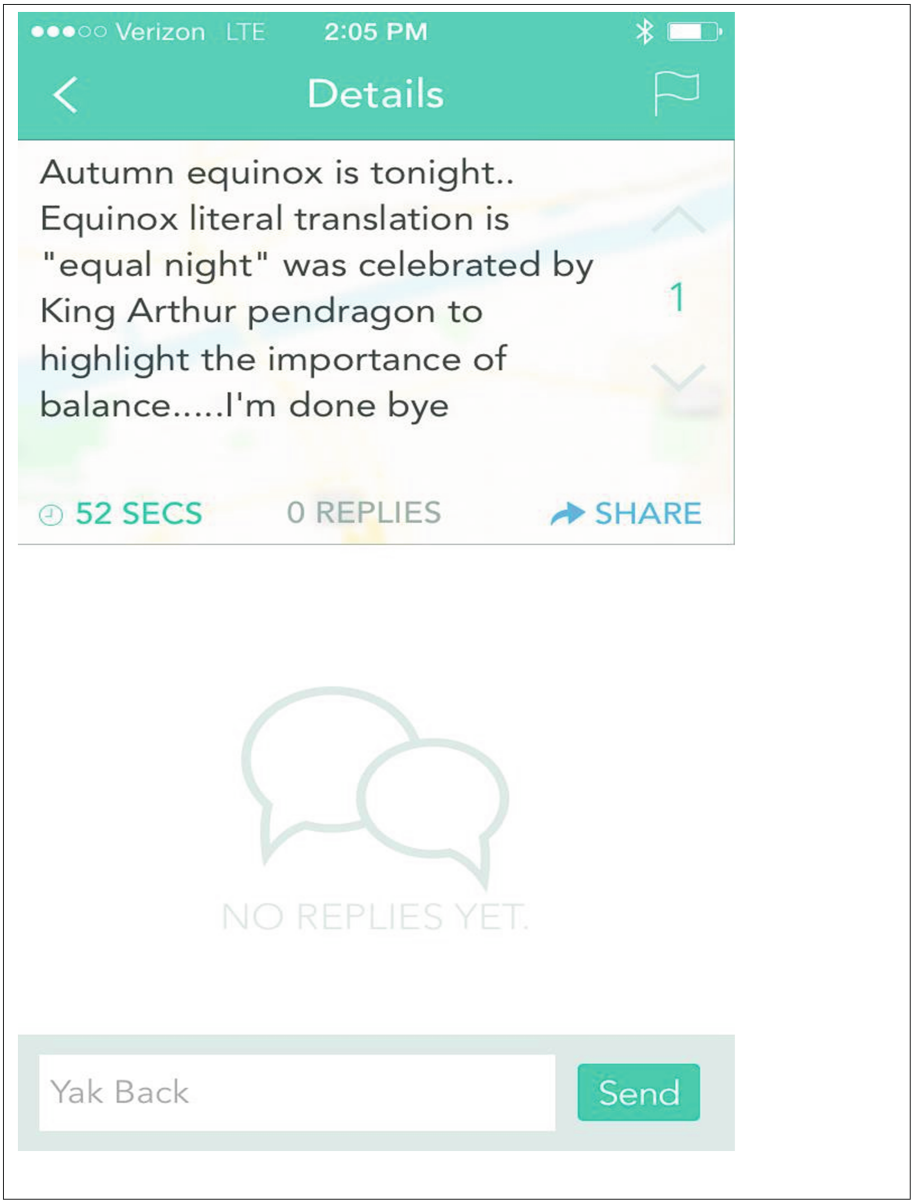

instagram.com/p/jwKSQGP01C/
Expand
Reply Retweet Favorite More
#SABANISAMIDGET @DanRayWalls · Jan 3
BREAKING NICK SABAN STATUE BEING TORN DOWN N TUSCALOOSA REMINDS ME OF WHEN THE IRAQIS TORE DOWN SADDAM'S. #PRAY4BAMA
FOX NEWS
10:32 ET
S&P
6.71
Expand
Reply Retweet Favorite More
Mississippi, US
Haley Hughes @haleyehughes · Nov 30
#pray4bama
Expand
Reply Retweet Favorite More
J.R. Lind @jrlind · 10 Nov 2012
#pray4bama RT @ccineastnash: Bama has now lost five games in the last four years. Will the misery never end.
Expand
Reply Retweet Favorite More
Khaleesi Jerron @Jerron1234 · 22 Jul 2012
@LT4BAMA @kellymonaco1. Kelly Kelly Kelly, Bama lies. Don't get your hopes up. She don't even take her medicine everyday. #Pray4Bama.
View conversation
Reply Retweet Favorite More
Taylor McMann @Taylor_McMann · 17 Jul 2012
I'm so tired of hearing about all these on campus shootings. Who in their right mind thinks it is ok to do that? STOP. #Pray4Bama #Pray4AU
Expand
Reply Retweet Favorite More
rae❤ @raeee21_ · 2 Mar 2012
i wouldnt know what to do if i was in a tornado & everything around me was flying everywhere... it would feel so surreal ! #pray4bama
Expand
Reply Retweet Favorite More
rhonda burridge @RhondaBurridge · 23 Jan 2012
RT @HighlandsNews: Highlands leadership is meeting w/local officials to assess the storm impact & respond. #pray4Bama coth.co/hresponse
Expand
Reply Retweet Favorite More
Derek ツ @DJBatts1 · 8 Dec 2011
To all followers if you are not watching the NCAA rewards then watch it now!!!!(: #Pray4Bama(: #Trent4Heisman(:
Expand
Reply Retweet Favorite More

Image 5: Arthur Pendragon conspiracy theory on Yik Yak



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