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## Great Shake-Out Teaches New Lessons

By Sophie Braccini



Orinda staff drop, cover, and hold at the EOC.

Photo Sophie Braccini

This year's Great California Shake-Out, conducted within the three Lamorinda communities Oct. 17, had a different scenario than last year: what challenges arise after the first 48 hours of a major earthquake.

The three Emergency Operations Centers of Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda as well as the Saint Mary's College EOC, the Orinda School District and Miramonte and Campolindo high schools participated. Dennis Rein, Lamorinda emergency preparedness coordinator, had given all participants a detailed scenario. At 10:17 a.m. last Thursday everyone at the EOCs dropped, covered, and held, then continued as if 48 hours had passed, organizing their resources to respond as well as possible to reports of problems coming to them. Initially, this involved testing the communication between radios at the different centers. Difficulties were identified immediately, such as one school that could not connect, and outdated contact lists. "Overall, things went well," said Janet Keeter, the Orinda city manager and incident commander. "It became very clear though that sustaining the rescue and organization with our limited staff would quickly become very difficult."

Orinda's EOC is located in the

City Hall building that is fully equipped and built to sustain a large magnitude earthquake. Lafayette's EOC is located in the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Community Room that was built with emergencies in mind, and includes an automatic generator and a kitchen. The biggest challenge in Moraga is that there is no permanent EOC and it took staff an hour to set one up at Fire Station 42.

The three incident commanders, Keeter, Lafayette's city manager Steven Falk and Jill Keimach, Moraga's town manager, confirmed that if a disaster were to hit Lamorinda, after

a few days the EOC would be consolidated into one location to be able to sustain the rescue operations. "By doing so we would have three people for each position," noted Falk. He said that conversation on that topic would continue between the three cities.

Saint Mary's College also reported good results. "The usual people who staff our EOC were not on campus that day," says Adan Tejada, the college's director of public safety, "so this was good practice and it went well." Tejada indicated that Saint Mary's would be open to discussing different possibilities, including a consolidated EOC.



Miramonte students evacuate buildings through a narrow gate during participation in the Great California Shake-Out Oct. 17. Photo Andy Scheck

## The Common Application: A Failed Launch That Keeps on Failing

By Elizabeth LaScala

Some 500 colleges and tens of thousands of students have come to depend on the Common Application. For those unfamiliar with the Common Application, what it is and what it does, consider yourselves lucky. That means you are not dealing with the problems it is causing high school seniors this fall. The Common Application (informally known as the Common App) is an undergraduate college admission application that students may use to apply to any of its 517 member colleges and universities in 47 states and the District of Columbia, as well as a half dozen international countries. The Common Application, Inc. is managed by the staff of a not-for-profit membership association governed by a volunteer member board of directors drawn from college admission deans and college guidance counselors.

An overhauled Common Application version went live on Aug. 1. The new platform was preceded by a full-blown marketing campaign and touted to offer many enhancements sure to please. Unfortunately, the Common App was beleaguered by opening day glitches and hobbled through its first week. As of this writing, issues continue to plague the system 79 days after its initial launch. As college counselors around the country work with panicked students, one name stands out among the rest as a beacon to guide us through the maze. Nancy Griesemer has been reliably and systematically addressing Common App issues from the launch date. Griesemer writes for the DC College Admissions Examiner and on Oct. 8 she offered tips that still make good sense today. They are summarized below along with some of my own advice:

1. "Don't procrastinate!" was always a good mantra for seniors applying to college. Now it is a survival strategy. Don't wait until the last minute to fill out the Common Application and avoid the 24 hours immediately preceding application deadlines. Of course, the deadlines are now a moving target since some

(but not all) colleges are responding to student distress (bless them) by extending their deadlines. Check your college website for up-to-the-minute information – your college is your absolute best go-to source for reliable, timely and accurate information.

2. Check the Common Application system requirements which are found at the bottom of each page of the application and follow them.

3. Avoid editing your essays in the text box. Your essay should be prepared as a Word document using simple font, single-spaced with no indents. To do paragraphs, double space (make two hard returns). Once you are satisfied with the document cut and paste it directly into the text box.

4. Print Preview is your best friend, but it is at the end of the process. You must complete each section of the application and obtain 'green check marks' for each part of the application before you are permitted to Print Preview. This is when you can check your application and be certain all the information you entered appears as you intended, including how your essay survived being added to the text box. If anything doesn't look right, go back and try again.

5. If problems continue, reboot your computer, check system settings, and change browsers to see if that helps. If you still have problems, contact the Common Application Help Desk.

6. Documentation is important. Print out and date your Print Preview just prior to submission so you have a hard copy.

7. Avoid paying twice. If you pay and you don't get a signature page, do not pay again. In other words, do not enter your credit card information twice. If your signature page (the last step in the process) does not appear after you pay, wait 48 hours for the Common App system to clear and then try again. If you are still unable to get to the signature page contact the Help Desk. For those of you who have already paid twice, the Common Application is arranging for refunds.

8. Sign your application. It is not

complete unless you sign it. Once you have paid, signed and submitted your application, you will receive a green check mark. This means you are able to submit part two of the app which is the Writing Supplement. These additional writing prompts require time to complete and colleges value them highly, so leave time to do a good job. And be sure to generate and print a Print Preview before submitting your writing supplement.

Most importantly, don't despair and don't give up. Remember, even though you may feel like crying, screaming or throwing something (or all three), you are not alone with these problems. The colleges do understand and will remain flexible. They don't want to lose your application. Use the Common App Help Desk that is available 24 hours a day. Keep up with the Common Application issues and solutions by 'liking' the Common Application on Facebook, following on Twitter and/or subscribing to updates from the support team <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/An-Update-From-The-Support-Team.html?soid=1102398051782&aid=UIrzlNjZq7Y>.



Elizabeth LaScala Ph.D. guides college, transfer and graduate school applicants through the complex world of admissions. She develops best match college lists, offers personalized interview and essay coaching, and tools and strategies to help students tackle each step of the admissions process with confidence and success. Elizabeth helps students from all backgrounds to maximize merit and financial aid awards. Visit [www.doingcollege.com](http://www.doingcollege.com); Call (925) 891-4491 or email at [elizabeth@doingcollege.com](mailto:elizabeth@doingcollege.com).

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