Central Office of Student Affairs

Recommended Protocol on Responding to the Death of a Student

The death of a student can be emotionally difficult and stressful for students, faculty, and staff. Recognizing the shock and profound sadness the student’s family and friends will experience, this recommended protocol is designed to ensure a professional and caring response by the university. Each College can adapt this protocol as needed to include the specific roles and responsibilities unique to the individual campus compositions and communities within CUNY.

The recommended protocol attempts to:

- Assist those dealing with the crisis to respond appropriately in a timely manner
- Provide coordination with external individuals and agencies
- Provide communication within the College community
- Assist with post-crisis support and resolution
- Provide an empathetic and caring voice from the College to friends and family of the deceased

When implementing the protocol remember: FERPA applies until the death is verified.

Depending upon the student’s academic status (matriculated, graduated, no longer enrolled) and the location where the death occurred (on campus, off campus) the procedures of this protocol will be implemented as appropriate. It is also important to understand that each situation is unique and that staff response should reflect the specific nature of each death.

Given the multi-cultural diversity of our CUNY students, it is important to be culturally sensitive and mindful when responding to the death of one of our CUNY students.

SECTION 1: Death of a Matriculated Student

When the student’s death is on campus:

1. The first responder will immediately contact Public Safety. Public Safety will immediately call 911. Public Safety officers will respond and be in charge of the scene of the incident until all appropriate actions have been taken. A ranking College Officer will be available, as appropriate. At the first opportunity, Public Safety officers will contact the Chief Student Affairs Officer & the Vice President of Administration (or their designees).

2. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will inform the Provost, and the President or designee, the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, and other senior staff of the student’s death. The Office of Communication will coordinate all contacts with the media.

3. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) will immediately inform the Dean of Students (or the second highest ranking Student Affairs Officer). The CSAO will delegate management of next steps...
including notification of the following: Office of Communications, student’s next of kin and if appropriate, members of the Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT), and other staff members to coordinate their efforts in consultation with the CSAO & the Office of Communications.

4. It is the coroner’s responsibility to notify the family in consultation with the Director of Public Safety. Once the coroner has contacted the family, The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee may then contact the student’s family to express condolences, and begin to coordinate all CUNY matters with respect to the student’s death.

5. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will also notify the Registrar, who will then notify Financial Aid, Bursar and Alumni Affairs. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will request a copy of the Death Certificate. A copy of the death certificate will be distributed to the Registrar. The Registrar will close the student’s academic record and inform Financial Aid, Bursar and Enrollment Management. When the death occurred on campus, the CUNY Public Safety Incident Report can be used as temporary verification of death in lieu of the official death certificate, until the family obtains the official death certificate.

6. When appropriate, the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will insure that the families of any students with the same name as the deceased student will be notified that their student was not the student involved.

7. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will notify, via email, the deceased student’s instructors and department chair.

8. The Director of Counseling Services, contacted by the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, will contact appropriate Counseling and Health Services staff and will respond to the scene, if appropriate. The Director of Counseling Services will coordinate psychological counseling and emotional support for those affected by the death.

9. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, will serve as the primary campus contact for the family of the deceased student and will meet with family members should they decide to come to campus. When appropriate, the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will assist the deceased student’s family in making arrangements to come to campus and other assistance as needed.

10. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will inform the Residence Life Coordinator of the death of any student who was living in a CUNY Residence. Access to the deceased student’s living quarters and personal effects should be restricted immediately following notification of the student’s death. Access to the deceased student’s living quarters and personal effects must be cleared with Public Safety, the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, as well as the Residence Life Coordinator/Director. A designated Director in Student Affairs appointed by the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will coordinate all processes related to facilitating the return of the deceased student’s property to the student’s family. Mindful that the deceased student might have friends in CUNY Residence halls, the CSAO will alert the Residence Life Coordinator even when the deceased student lived off campus. CUNY staff will be particularly sensitive to the deceased student’s roommate.

11. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will inform the Director of Athletics of the death of any student-athlete. Access to the deceased student’s athletic property and personal effects should be restricted immediately following notification of the student’s death. Access to the deceased student’s property must be cleared with Public Safety, the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, as well as the Director of Athletics. In coordination with the Chief Student Affairs Officer
(CSAO) or designee, the Director of Athletics will facilitate the return of the deceased student’s athletic property to the student’s family.

12. If the deceased student was an international student, the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will notify the University Director of International Students who will provide input and guidance (e.g., consular outreach, repatriation) as necessary. The International Student Advisor on the respective campus should also be informed.

13. If the student was enrolled or a participant in any specific programs such as Disability Services, SEEK/CD, Black Male Initiative, Women’s Center, Veteran’s Affairs, Child Care Center, and/or student leadership clubs or organizations, the Directors of each respective program should be notified of the student death so they can respond appropriately.

14. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will inform the Student Government Association (SGA) leadership, when appropriate. SGA leadership should be included in the planning of any memorial or remembrance.

15. If appropriate, the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, in coordination with the President’s Office, will write a letter of condolence to the family of the deceased student.

16. The Director of Counseling Services, in consultation with other appropriate staff and students, will coordinate assistance to those wishing to hold a memorial service on campus for the deceased student.

17. Upon being notified by the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or Provost, the chair of the deceased student’s academic department will facilitate the return to the family of any property that the deceased student may have left in the academic department’s area.

18. Upon being notified by the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, the Coordinator of Student Life will reach out to and address student group affiliations, as appropriate.

19. At a time after the death of a student, a meeting may be called by the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, to insure that all appropriate measures have been taken in response to the student’s death.

This meeting might include representatives from the following areas:
- Director of Student Life/Student Relations
- Residence Life Coordinator
- Director of Public Safety
- Director of Counseling Services
- Office of Legal Counsel
- Director of the Office of Communications
- Director of Health Services
- Registrar or designee
- Bursar of designee
- Director of International Student Services
- Office of Risk Management

When the student’s death is off-campus:
1. Anyone becoming aware of the death of a student will contact the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee to inform the CSAO of the death.
2. Items 2-19 will be enacted, if appropriate.

Note: Student Transitions Programs (STP) or the Commencement Committee will be notified to ensure student’s name is included in commencement ceremony.

SECTION 2: Notification of the death of a recent graduate or previously enrolled student:
1. Anyone becoming aware of the death of a recent graduate (i.e., within 2 years of graduation) or a recent previous student (someone who was recently enrolled but is not currently attending) will notify the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee.
2. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will notify and work with the Registrar to verify the information.
3. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will notify the Office of Communication.
4. Registrar will inform Financial Aid and Bursar to convene appropriate notifications regarding deceased student’s business with the college.
5. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will notify the Office of the President and coordinate an appropriate response.

SECTION 3: Suggested Staff Responsibilities in the Case of a Student Death
NOTE: This plan makes reference to specific individuals (job titles) in setting forth the notification and response sequence in the event of a student’s death. The need for immediate action – particularly early in the timeline – may require a fluid response and the participation of designees or deputies, if key individuals are unavailable. In the event that any CUNY department is the first to be notified of a student’s death, that department will immediately notify the CSAO.

**Director of Public Safety**
♦ If the death is on campus, the Director of Public Safety will be in charge of the scene and will conduct an initial investigation. Public safety officers will immediately call 911 to request police assistance.

♦ The Director of Public Safety will contact the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, at the first opportunity, on the details of the situation. The College President, the VP of Administration and the University Director of Public Safety will be immediately notified as well.

♦ The Director of Public Safety will coordinate with other campus staff, as appropriate, and maintain communication with College Office of Communication staff to facilitate media response.

♦ The Director of Public Safety will ensure that all areas where the deceased student’s personal effects may be present on the campus including Residence Halls, Athletic facilities, library, academic departments and labs, are secured and all access is denied until deemed appropriate by Public Safety. When the deceased student lived in a CUNY Residence Hall, particular sensitivity and concern is needed for the deceased student’s roommates. As such, Public Safety will closely coordinate with Director of Residence and Director of Counseling around safeguarding the deceased student’s effects, while being maximally sensitive to the impact of the death on any roommates.
**Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO)**

♦ The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) will immediately contact and inform the Dean of Students (or the second highest ranking Student Affairs Officer) and Registrar of the situation and consult with the Director of the Office of Communications.

♦ It is the coroner’s responsibility to notify the family in consultation with the Director of Public Safety. Once the coroner has contacted the family, the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee may then contact the student’s family to express condolences, and begin to coordinate all CUNY matters with respect to the student’s death.

♦ The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will contact appropriate staff members and coordinate their efforts. If the student was a resident in a CUNY Housing facility, contact Residence Life Coordinator. Particular concern and sensitivity will be needed in notifying and assisting or counseling any roommates.

♦ When appropriate, the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will contact College Program Directors and Academic Chairs who maintain direct oversight of the student. The Program Director or Chair will notify additional staff members and coordinate any efforts with the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee.

♦ The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will notify via email the faculty who currently has the student enrolled in one of their classes.

♦ The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will contact and inform the Director of Counseling Services of the situation.

♦ The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will inform the Student Government Association (SGA) leadership of the death of any student, when appropriate.

♦ The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee will request a copy of the Death Certificate from the family. Copies of the death certificate will be distributed to the Registrar. When the death occurred on campus, the CUNY Public Safety Incident Report can be used as temporary verification of death in lieu of the official death certificate, until the family obtains the official death certificate.

♦ The Registrar will inform the Bursar and Director of Financial Aid. These individuals will insure that appropriate steps are taken in response to the student’s death.

♦ The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, will coordinate—in collaboration with Public Safety -- the release of the deceased student’s personal effects to the student’s family.

♦ At some time after the death of a student, a meeting may be called by the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee of involved staff members to insure that all appropriate measures have been taken in response to the student’s death. A checklist of notifications and any documentation will be kept on file in the Office of the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee.

♦ Within two weeks of the student’s death, the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) will provide information to the President’s Office, who will then coordinate the writing of a letter of condolence from the President and the College Community to the family of the deceased student, if appropriate. The letter may accompany a posthumous diploma if one has been ordered. The letter may also include the return of the original death certificate to the family. The letter may also accompany academic documents (such as a thesis) which may be returned to the family.

♦ If the student is near graduation, the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) will consult with the Registrar regarding a Posthumous Degree. See Posthumous Degree Policy.
Director of the Office of Communications
♦ When appropriate and after consultation with the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) and Director of Public Safety, the Director of the Office of Communications will coordinate media inquiries.
♦ All media inquiries concerning the student’s death will be referred to designated staff in the Office of Communications.

Registrar
♦ Upon notification of a student’s death, the Registrar will close the student’s official record, and mark deceased on record. This codes the student information system so that no ordinary communication is sent to the student, parents or spouse.
♦ Registrar will review registration activity, adjusting the record as appropriate. The registrar will notify financial aid and bursar to adjust their financial records. The registrar will notify the National Student Clearinghouse so that lending agencies are notified of the student’s death. The registrar will review the academic record to see if student is eligible for a posthumous degree.
♦ Registrar will consider “hiding” records of deceased CUNY students in situations with substantial media involvement, or situations involving famous students.

Bursar
♦ Upon being notified of a student’s death, the Bursar will settle the student’s financial accounts with the College, as appropriate, and will process any allowable refund of tuition, fees and pro-rated housing contract dollars. The refund check is made payable to the student’s estate and mailed separate from the College’s condolence letter by the Bursar’s Office. The Bursar may also refund other fees.

Director of Financial Aid
♦ Upon being notified of a student’s death, the Director of Financial Aid will finalize any remaining wage payments and close any employment records which the deceased student may have.
♦ The Director of Financial Aid will review the student’s financial aid situation and, if the deceased student has any federal loans, will take the proper steps so that these loans may be forgiven.

Director of Counseling Services
♦ The Director of Counseling Services will assist the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, as needed, to coordinate the campus response to the student death.
♦ The Director of Counseling will contact other Counseling and Health Center staff, as appropriate.
♦ If the death occurred on campus, the Director of Counseling Services will respond to the scene, if appropriate, and will coordinate psychological counseling and emotional support for those affected by the death.
♦ The Director of Counseling Services will seek out students and staff who might have been affected by the student death, such as significant others, friends, roommates, teammates, others living in the deceased student’s building, and will offer appropriate services.
♦ The Director of Counseling, in consultation with SGA leaders, Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, and others will coordinate assistance to those wishing to hold a memorial service on campus for the deceased student.

Residence Life Coordinator
♦ If the death occurred in Residence Life, the Director of Student Relations and the Residence Life Coordinator will contact appropriate Residence Life staff and will coordinate Residence Life’s response to the student’s death.
If the death occurred in Residence Life, the Director of Student Relations and the Residence Life Coordinator and other Residence Life staff will work to assist other residents who may be affected by the student’s death. Roommates may need particular sensitivity and support.

In coordination with Public Safety, the Chief Student Affairs Officer or designee, the Director of Residence Life will facilitate the return of the deceased student’s property which may remain at Residence Life.

**Director of Athletics**

- Upon being informed of the student’s death, the Athletics Director will inform appropriate coaching staff of the death of any student athlete.

- In coordination with Public Safety, the Chief Student Affairs Officer or designee, the Athletics Director, will facilitate the return of the deceased student’s property which may remain at CUNY athletics facilities.

**Academic Chairs/ Program Directors**

- Upon being notified of a student’s death by the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, the Academic Chair/Program Director of the deceased student’s academic department will inform appropriate department faculty and staff of the death.

- In coordination with Public Safety, the chair/program director of the deceased student’s academic department will coordinate the return to the family of any property that the deceased student may have left in areas controlled by the department.

**Director of International Student Services**

- When an international student dies, the Director of International Students Services or the Coordinator of International Student Services will provide information about the student’s family, so that a letter of condolences from either the Chief of Student Affairs or President can be appropriately addressed.

- Communication with the family may require a translation service. The Director of International Student Services should identify the student’s first language so that the letter is properly translated by a professional. Cultural sensitivity is particularly important.

- The repatriation of the body is subject to strict regulation. If this is the case, the appropriate consulate or embassy may need to be involved. Therefore, advice and guidance should be provided by the Director of International Student Services if this is required.

**Office of Risk Management**

- Upon being notified of a student’s death by the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee, Office of Risk Management will review the situation and provide input and guidance as indicated.
Appendix I

Proposed Checklist

- Did you notify the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) or designee?
- Did you notify the HR Benefits Unit?
- Was the student an employee of the university? If so, contact all involved departments. Did you notify same-name students and parents?
- Have you helped the family representative contact pertinent campus departments such as HR if the student was additionally a CUNY employee? Have you communicated regarding personal belongings, financial obligations, etc.?
- Did you contact Student Activities regarding any student group affiliations?
- Have you provided consultation on a memorial event to interested departments/organizations?
- Have you consulted with the family representative about private memorial events? Have you communicated this information, along with dates and times, to the relevant campus community?

During 24 - 48 hours

- If applicable, did you consult with the Communications Department and the Registrar on the appropriate release of information?
- Did you review information on Benefits and Payroll, if applicable, in order to discuss with the family of the deceased?

48+ Hours

- Have you reviewed the following for applicability?
  - Death Certificates
  - Donations and gifts
  - Family of deceased and travel expenses
  - Obituary
  - Posthumous awards
  - Transportation of remains
- Have you secured and inventoried personal possessions and in accordance with Public Safety arranged for retrieval?
- Did the ‘Bursar’s Office coordinate refunds from all pertinent areas.