Student Death Policy

Policy 403.4

1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines that will support an orderly, effective, and caring response in the event of a Student death.

2 Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all Students of the University, as defined in paragraph 3.3 below.

2.2 All University personnel must comply with this policy.

3 Definitions

3.1 Medical Examiner

An individual duly appointed and licensed in the State of North Carolina to conduct postmortem investigations, to determine the cause and manner of death in certain situations, and to perform other duties set forth in N.C.G.S. Section 130A, Article 16 – Postmortem Investigation and Disposition, as that statute may be amended from time to time.

3.2 Primary Contact

The Dean of Students and/or a designee from Office of Student Development, who may be appointed by and at the discretion of the Vice Chancellor for Student Development to serve as the single point of contact for family members who wish to speak with University faculty, staff, or students concerning the death of their Student.

3.3 Student

An individual who is enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at the University at the time of death; or an individual who has completed the immediate preceding term at the University and is eligible for re-enrollment, in the event the death occurs during the recess period between fall and spring semesters or summer sessions. Students may also be part-time employees of the University.

3.4 University

Appalachian State University.

3.5 University Sponsored Travel

Travel which is led by a University employee or for which academic credit is awarded, or any other travel administered by, conducted under the direction of, or with financial support from, any University department, program, or office.

4 Policy and Procedure Statements

4.1 General Policy

4.1.1 Appalachian State University intends to provide a safe and positive environment for all students. When tragedy does occur, it is incumbent upon the University to respond in a sensitive and caring manner, recognizing that individuals respond in different ways to different circumstances that may surround a death. The death of a student affects the entire University community, as well as the family and friends of the deceased. Considering the very sensitive and unpredictable nature of a death, no policy or protocol can describe in complete detail all the steps that must be taken. This policy sets forth guidelines to support communications in the event of a Student death. Those responsible for implementing this policy should be guided by the essential communication needs required in these situations, as well as by empathy, sensitivity and support for the bereaved and the need to preserve important evidence.

4.2 Notification of Appropriate Campus Officials

The Dean of Students or designee should notify the following offices by email and/or phone, or otherwise ensure that the offices have been notified of a Student death.

4.2.1 Primary – contact as soon as possible

1. University Police
2. University Housing (if a residential Student)
3. Office of the Chancellor
4. Academic Affairs
5. University Communications
6. Counseling & Psychological Services
7. Director of Athletics (if deceased is a student-athlete)
8. Office of International Education and Development (if deceased is an international Student or Student abroad)

4.2.2 Secondary – contact as soon as practical

1. University Advancement
2. Office of Student Financial Aid
3. Office of the Chief Information Officer
4. Office of Student Accounts
5. Student Health Services
6. Office of the Registrar
7. Campus Bookstore
8. General Counsel
9. Others as appropriate

4.3 Student Death On Campus

4.3.1 If a Student death occurs on campus, University Police (828-262-8000 or Ext. 8000) shall be notified immediately. University Police will contact the appropriate emergency medical provider to attend to the body. The University Police will investigate all deaths on campus to rule out the possibility of any element of foul play.

4.3.1.1 If a Student death occurs in a residence hall, the residence hall staff member immediately involved shall place the call to University Police and describe the situation.

4.3.1.2 If the Student is an International Student, the Office of International Education and Development shall be contacted as soon as possible.

4.4 Student Death Off Campus

4.4.1. Response to any death occurring off campus will be handled initially by the local law enforcement agency, medical examiner and/or the hospital involved. It is the responsibility of these agencies to notify the next of kin.

4.4.2 If the death occurs in the Town of Boone or Watauga County, University Police may be notified by the corresponding law enforcement agency. In the event another campus official is informed of the Student's death, that official must contact University Police as soon as possible to convey the information.

4.4.3 If a death occurs during University Sponsored Travel, the University staff member accompanying the trip should immediately contact local emergency services and the local law enforcement agency. As soon as possible once the situation is secured, the University staff member shall contact the Dean of Students.

4.4.4 If a death occurs while a Student is studying abroad

1. The program leader or representative of host institution will contact the Office of International Education and Development and the US Embassy or Consulate.
2. The Associate Vice Chancellor of International Education and Development and/or Dean of Students will activate the Appalachian International Crisis Response Team (ICRP) to coordinate plans for dealing with the situation.
3. The program leader or representative will follow all aforementioned procedures outlined in the event of a study abroad Student’s death. See Section E of the Appalachian International Crisis Management Protocols for further details.

4.4.5 If the Student is an International Student, the Office of International Education and Development shall be contacted as soon as possible.

4.5 Student Postvention Response Team

4.5.1 The Vice Chancellor for Student Development shall identify appropriate University administrators to serve on the Student Postvention Response Team. That group's responsibilities shall include but not be limited to the following:

4.5.2 Convene, at the direction of the Dean of Students or designee, upon receiving news of a Student death; and

4.5.3 Provide assistance, upon request and at the direction of the Dean of Students or designee, in making communications or otherwise providing support in the event of a Student death.

4.6 Family Communication

4.6.1 At the discretion of the Vice Chancellor for Student Development, the Dean of Students and/or a designee from Office of Student Development who is familiar with the situation may be assigned as the Primary Contact.

4.6.2 The Primary Contact shall serve as the single point of contact for family members who wish to speak with faculty, staff, or students concerning the death of their Student.

4.6.3 The Primary Contact may utilize the Student Postvention Response Team or others as a resource.

4.7 Campus Community Notification

4.7.1 The University Police will send out a Campus Safety Alert if it is determined there is an on-going threat to the campus community.

4.7.2 Other than the Campus Safety Alert described in Section 4.8.1, the Office of Student Development, in consultation with the Student Postvention Response Team, will determine as soon as practical what notifications will be made to the campus community.

4.8 Media Involvement

4.8.1 University Communications will be responsible for collecting and disseminating information to the media. All media requests for information should be directed to this office. University Communications will work with University Police, the Office of Student Development, and the Office of General Counsel to maintain the accuracy and ensure the legality of the information disseminated.

4.8.2 Under North Carolina law, only a Medical Examiner has authority to determine the cause and manner of a death that is not attended by medical personnel and other types of death, including but not limited to deaths that might reasonably have been due to a violent or traumatic injury or accident. Accordingly, no person involved in the University's response to a Student death will speculate as to the cause of death or make statements assigning responsibility for the cause of death. Responses to requests for such information by the media or others should note that the University will cooperate fully with the agencies and officials charged with investigating and determining the cause and circumstances of the death.

4.8.3 The Office of the Chancellor, in consultation with the Offices of University Communications and General Counsel as appropriate, will be responsible for communications with the UNC General Administration, the Board of Trustees, the Foundation Board, and other constituents of the University.

4.9 Disclosure of Records/Release of Records

4.9.1 Requests for information about a deceased Student may be received by many individuals and offices, including but not limited to individual faculty members, the Registrar, the Bursar, Health Services, Counseling & Psychological Services, and others. All requests for information should be referred to the family's Primary Contact. Such requests shall be considered on an individual basis, in consultation with the Office of General Counsel as appropriate. Primary consideration will be given to requests that are supported in writing by the deceased's immediate or surviving family. In all cases, proof-of-death in the form of a death certificate is required.

5 Additional References

University Housing Crisis Manual Quick Reference Guide
Appalachian International Crisis Management Protocols
N.C.G.S. Section 130A, Article 16 – Public Health – Post Mortem Investigation and Disposition
Student Death Protocol
Crises Response Protocol for Suicide Ideation and Attempts

6 Authority

The UNC Policy Manual Chapter 100.1 – The Code, Section 502

7 Contact Information

8 Original Effective Date

August 18, 2015

9 Revision Dates