Purpose:
This document has been prepared to meet the needs of senior leadership who need information about emerging, developing or ongoing matters. This is an internal communication prepared for senior university leadership.

Usage guidance:
The information is intended for use in preparing your own communications in response to questions. Please work with your Communications Liaison and University Communications prior to making public statements (media, social media, public presentations, etc.):
- that represent the university’s position on strategic initiatives and/or funding priorities
- regarding decisions/discussions made by or likely to be made by the Chancellor or leadership boards (Board of Trustees, Foundation Board, Board of Visitors, Alumni Council, Parent & Family Association Board)
- regarding or affecting government relations
- regarding matters that affect the entire UNC System (or multiple institutions within the System)
- regarding matters having an impact on the health and wellness of students, faculty and/or staff
- regarding matters that have or are likely to generate significant public engagement

Please note:
For emerging issues generating broad discussion or significant inquiry, University Communications pushes out communication guidance via the Communications Liaison network, with the expectation they are immediately sharing this information with you. Please review your preferred protocol with your Communications Liaison.

TOPIC: STUDENT DEATH PROTOCOL

Overview:
- In the event in which a crime has occurred and there has been determined to be an ongoing credible threat to those on campus, under federal law we send the entire campus community a timely warning, via email, immediately after the determination is made. Additional security measures are also activated.
- In the event of the confirmation of a significant emergency or dangerous situation that is ongoing or imminently threatening the health or safety of students or staff occurring on the campus, an emergency notification is sent to campus via numerous methods of communication. Significant security measures are activated.
- Appalachian follows an established Student Death Protocol, which prioritizes student safety and is informed by research and guidance from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
- The university does not “cover up” or “sweep under the rug” student death, crimes or reports of crimes. The top concern at all times is student wellness and safety.
- In the state of North Carolina, only a medical examiner can determine the cause of death. The university does not confirm or discuss the cause of death of our students. In fact, the university
FAQs:

**How does the university respond when a student dies?**

Please view Appalachian’s Student Death Protocol [here](#). 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. These guidelines are designed to help faculty, professional staff, administrators and other university employees respond to the death of a student in a cohesive manner.

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.

Immediately upon the death of a student, a postvention team begins working to identify and provide support to those who have been identified as being connected to or having an affinity with the deceased student. University representatives reach out to the student’s family and endeavor to keep their wishes and requests paramount while providing them with support and assistance as requested.

All deaths on campus will be investigated by Appalachian State University Police to determine if there are any signs of possible foul play. The area where the deceased is found will be treated as a crime scene and no one, especially the media, will be permitted in the area until such time as police and medical officials approve.

**Why doesn’t campus get notifications about student deaths?**

Guidance from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) recommends following our [established protocol](#) to maintain normalcy on campus to the greatest extent possible. Per our established protocol, Student Affairs activates a Postvention Response Team, which communicates notifications as appropriate. This allows the team to implement an intentional outreach plan that provides resources and support to identified members of the university community, but rarely involves sending a campus-wide communication. Media inquiries are managed by University Communications.

**I heard a student died from my student(s) who need to miss class – what should I do?**

First of all, don’t worry about trying to verify anything. The Dean of Students office is available to provide faculty notifications for students who need to miss class. Refer the student(s) who need to miss class to the Dean of Students office. This will not only help you, it will also help the student...
and the Dean of Students office staff in their ongoing efforts to identify those who need assistance and connect them to a support system that they may not have known about.

My students are asking me about the death of a student/the circumstances around the death of a student- what do I say/do?
• Recognize that these discussions can have extreme consequences and resist any temptation to speculate or discuss anything beyond known, confirmed facts.
• Understand that immediately upon the death of a student, a postvention team begins working to identify and provide support to those who have been identified as being connected to or having an affinity with the deceased student.
• Refer students who seem distressed or have questions to the Dean of Students office, 828-262-8284.

How can I help a student or co-worker or parent/family member of a student who seems very concerned or very affected by the news of a student’s death?

For students:
• The Counseling Center staff can provide students with support, within a confidential setting, in coping with grief, stress or other concerns. The center is located on the first floor of the Miles Annas Building. Hours are Monday – Friday, 8:00am – 5:00pm, and you can reach them by phone at 828-262-3180. If calling after hours, select the option for a counselor on call.
• The Appalachian Cares website provides the most up-to-date, comprehensive list of campus, local, regional and national resources; it is available at any time; and many of the hotlines are available 24 hours a day.
• The Dean of Students office, 828-262-8284, provides tailored resources and assistance as needed.

For parents and families:
• Don’t underestimate the power of communication. You can find specific information about how to talk with and help your students cope with grief or stress here.
• While meaningful, thoughtful discussions, particularly ones emphasizing an understanding of the resources available to your student, are very important, small thoughtful “touches” like a phone call or even a “thinking of you” text can make a big difference.
• Family can be the most important resource a student can have during difficult times. If you have concerns about the wellbeing of your student, the Dean of Students office can work with you to develop a specific plan of support.

For faculty and staff:
• If you are experiencing stress or need to talk with someone yourself, utilize the free and confidential counseling services available for faculty and staff.
• We have developed resources specifically to help faculty and staff recognize and support students in distress. Spend some time in class talking about their concerns. Your conversations may lead to them finding help for themselves or someone they know.
• Encourage your students to communicate with their parents, friends or other support networks. Communication is critically important to processing and healing during times of emotional stress.
STUDENT DEATH PROTOCOL FAQs – a document for senior leadership

• Don’t hesitate to contact the Dean of Students office at 828-262-8284 or if you have questions or concerns about a student.
• Utilize the Early Intervention Team if you are concerned about a student.
• If you think a student might be troubled, but aren’t sure, err on the side of caution. If you contact the Early Intervention Team or Dean of Students office, you aren’t “turning in” a student - you are simply putting the student in a position to access personalized assistance and resources and help them develop a plan for success.
• Visit the Appalachian Cares website for campus, local, regional and national resources and hotlines.

Additional resources:
• Appalachian’s Student Death Protocol
• Suicide prevention resources
• April 18, 2019 story in The Appalachian “Student death: how App State communicates after tragic events”
• Appalachian Cares clearinghouse resource site
• Website for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a division of the US Department of Health & Human Services
• September 10, 2019 message to parents from Interim Dean of Students Alan Rasmussen and Chief of Police/Director of Public Safety Andy Stephenson

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