



UNIVERSITY  
of HAWAII®  
**HILO**

Division of Student Affairs  
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

August 1, 2022

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Bonnie Irwin, Chancellor

From: Farrah-Marie Gomes, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

Subject: REQUEST FOR APPROVAL TO REVISE THE PROTOCOL FOR RESPONDING TO A STUDENT DEATH

SPECIFIC ACTION REQUESTED:

The Division of Student Affairs at UH Hilo is requesting approval to revise the Protocol for Responding to a Student Death, herein referred to as the Student Death Protocol.

RECOMMENDED EFFECTIVE DATE:

The recommended effective date is August 22, 2022 to coincide with the start of the 2022-2023 Academic Year.

ADDITIONAL COST:

This request does not include any additional costs to UH Hilo.

PURPOSE:

The proposed changes to the Student Death Protocol would allow for clearer communication with the campus community when a student death occurs. These changes also better align with death protocols for current and past employees.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The prior version of the Student Death Protocol was approved in 2009. Since then and in most recent years, faculty and staff have requested more transparency around student deaths.

Consultation. As changes to the protocol are minor, consultation was limited to the Student Affairs Leadership Council and Faculty Congress. Neither group had concerns with the proposed revisions.

ACTION RECOMMENDED:

It is recommended that Chancellor Irwin authorize the Division of Student Affairs to revise the Student Death Protocol to clarify communication procedures within the protocol.

APPROVED / DISAPPROVED

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Bonnie Irwin, Chancellor UH Hilo

8/4/2022

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# PROTOCOL FOR RESPONDING TO A STUDENT DEATH

University of Hawai`i at Hilo

## Introduction

The death of a student can be deeply emotional and stressful for students, faculty, staff, and the family of the student. The University of Hawai`i at Hilo strives to respond appropriately and sensitively in the event of the death of a currently enrolled student. To that end, the following protocol has been developed to ensure a caring, professional, coordinated, and consistent response by the University administration.

## Coordinating Office for University Response

Information about a student's death may come to the attention of any member of the University community, and may come from a variety of sources, such as a phone call or visit from the family, friend, or roommate of the student, an obituary, a police officer, or a report in the media. The person receiving such information should immediately notify the Dean of Students (DOS), who will act as the coordinator for all University responses.

## Immediate Communication

The DOS will immediately notify the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and the Director of University Relations of the report of a student's death. In instances in which a report of a death is not verified, the DOS will indicate to these individuals that efforts are being taken to verify the death and that verification will be provided as soon as possible. The DOS will prepare a summary record and submit it to the Vice Chancellors for Student, Academic, and Administrative Affairs and the Director of University Relations (Refer to Appendix A for a copy of the "Summary Record"). The summary record will also be used as a tool to assist the DOS with following the established protocol. In no cases will the campus community or the media be informed of the student's death until the death has been verified and primary family members have been notified.

## Verification of Death

Before initiating any further actions or communications, the DOS must be certain of the validity of a report of a student's death. The DOS will use his/her judgement as to whether documents verifying a student's death are necessary. When documentation is deemed necessary, sensitivity to the grieving family is paramount so verification must be obtained as tactfully as possible. Verification can be established by obtaining documents such as a death certificate, obituary, coroner's office report, official military correspondence, or a US Consulate or ambassadorial office (if outside of the US).

## Communication with Family of the Student

Upon confirmation of the death of a student, the DOS will contact the family and extend condolences on behalf of the University and solicit the family's wishes for condolences from faculty, staff and students. The Chancellor or Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs may wish to contact the family instead of or in addition to the DOS. The DOS should be informed about

other personnel of the UH Hilo community who are in communication with the family about official UH business prior to a memorial or funeral service being held. The general protocol for communicating with the family of the student or any other individual or group is to always refer to the student by name, not as the “deceased” or “victim” or any other generic term.

The DOS will draft a formal letter of condolence for the University from the Chancellor and send a separate note of condolence on behalf of the members of the Division of Student Affairs. Condolences to the family should always be consistent with the family’s wishes.

#### Notification to the University Community

In collaboration with University Relations and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, the DOS will review the particular circumstances of the student’s death, including the wishes of the family, and determine how much information will be shared in an announcement to all members of the University community

The DOS will notify the specific University personnel listed below. The notification will include the full name of the student; student’s UH identification number, brief details (if appropriate) of the circumstances of the death (if known); information about memorial or funeral services; name(s) and mailing address of family; requested method of condolences obtained from the family, if any (e.g., donations to a charity, contributions to a scholarship fund); and information about when and how the broader University community will be informed about the student’s death (if at all). The DOS will provide consultation and assistance to campus departments and groups if they wish to organize a memorial event on campus.

#### Suicide Related Deaths

When a student death is the result of a suicide, special consideration should be given:

- To assist those impacted by the suicide cope with their trauma and grief and reduce the intensity of their emotional, mental physical and behavioral reactions.
- To stabilize the campus community, restore some semblance of order and routine, and help the community return to their pre-crisis level of functioning.
- To prevent/limit the risk of further suicides and imitative suicidal behavior through contagion. Vulnerable students who are struggling psychologically may be influenced to act in a similar way and may see suicide as a viable option (Velting & Gould, 1997).
- To assess current campus health and wellness efforts to determine if improvements are needed in suicide prevention, postvention, and response efforts.

The DOS, in coordination with the Campus Crisis Management Team and the Director of Counseling Services, will determine institutional communication and response. Institutional communication will be guided by the safe messaging principles recommended at <http://reportingonsuicide.org>.

#### Administrative Action

Once notified, University personnel will take the actions described below. All offices should remove the student’s name from any mailing lists (paper or electronic) that it maintains and withhold any future correspondence addressed to the student.

- Office of the Registrar: Indicate in the student information system that the student is deceased. Withdraw the student from all courses enrolled in for the current term (and for future terms, if applicable). If the student had an outstanding Incomplete grade from a previous term, contact the instructor to obtain a change of grade for the course (it is anticipated that most often the grade would be changed to a "W"). If the student had applied for graduation, contact the dean of the student's college to ask if he/she would like to request awarding a posthumous degree (see section on Posthumous Degrees and Certificates below); if not, cancel the application.
- Counseling Services: Provide avenues of campus support for grieving members of the University community. This may include outreach efforts to individuals such as friends, roommates and students who lived in the same residence hall as the student; faculty members and students taking the courses in which the student was enrolled; coaches and team members if the student was a student-athlete; and advisors and members of student organizations in which the student was involved.
- Student's Instructors, Academic Advisor, Department Chair and Academic Dean: These individuals will be informed that the student has been withdrawn from all courses the student was enrolled in, and that they may contact Counseling Services to discuss services that may be available to them or students in the class, department and/or college. Update any student's records in the department and/or college. The dean of the college may request awarding of a posthumous degree and/or certificate (see section on Posthumous Degrees and Certificates below).
- University Housing: Follow internal University Housing protocol if student death occurs in the residence halls. If the student resided on campus, arrange with the student's family for the return of his/her personal possessions. Inform roommates and friends of the student who live on-campus and enlist the assistance of the Counseling Services to provide avenues of support for grieving students. Withhold billing, close out the student's account, cancel housing contract and application for housing for a future term (if applicable), and update records accordingly. Determine whether a full or pro-rated refund for room and board is appropriate and inform the Business Office of any refunds. Communicate with DOS to determine appropriate method of distributing any refunds.
- Business Office: Stop billing on the student's account. As instructed by the DOS, process any refunds due to the student and cancel any financial obligations. Communicate with DOS to determine appropriate method of distributing any refunds.
- Financial Aid Office: Notify appropriate agencies of the student's death and cancel any aid awarded to the student for future terms.
- Vice Chancellor of Administrative Affairs: Assess and respond to liability issues if death was work-related or connected to a University activity or event (for example, in the event of an accidental death).
- Career Development Services: If the student was employed on campus, notify the office at which the student was employed of the student's death and instruct them to initiate appropriate payroll actions. If the student has a paycheck that has not yet been processed or distributed, consult with the DOS to determine appropriate method of distributing the paycheck.
- Intercollegiate Athletics: Update records relating to the student and facilitate counseling services as needed for other members of teams and/or coaches for which the student participated.

- Library: Update any library records accordingly and determine action to be taken if the student has any outstanding library obligations or items checked out.
- International Student Services: Update student's immigration record as appropriate if the student was an international student.
- Center for Global Education and Exchange: Notify the contact person at the student's home school if the student was an exchange student from another international institution, update any student records as appropriate, cancel application for study abroad or exchange if the student had applied to participate in such a program for a future term. If the student was a UH Hilo student participating in a study abroad or exchange program outside the US, contact the host institution to obtain as much information as possible about the circumstances of the student's death, and report this information to the DOS. Request the host institution to contact the US Bureau of Consular Affairs to notify them of student's death, which has procedures to handle the death of a US student overseas, and request a "Report of Death of an American Citizen Abroad" as proof of death in lieu of a death certificate. Work with the host institution overseas to terminate the student's enrollment and cancel billing (if necessary). If the student had a bank account overseas, request host institution to contact bank and freeze student's account until further notice and request information about procedures for his/her family to access the account.
- National Student Exchange Program: Notify the NSE coordinator at the student's home school and the NSE Central Office, update any student records as appropriate, cancel NSE application and initiate refund of NSE application fee if the student had applied to participate in the program for a future term. If the student was a UH Hilo student participating in an exchange program, contact the NSE coordinator at the host institution to obtain as much information as possible about the circumstances of the student's death, and report this information to the DOS.
- Information Technology Services: The DOS will notify ITS and provide the following information so that ITS can create an auto-reply message and ensure that no new email is accepted: student's UH username or ID number, name, and date of death. ITS will set the account for auto-reply and do-not-save-messages to the student's account. The standard message (subject to change by the Dean) is "This is an automated message. This account is no longer available." ITS will also clear the password. As of the date of death, the account enters the "grace period;" at the end of the grace period, the account is deleted.
- Alumni Office: Remove the student's name from any active correspondence lists and cease any direct solicitations.
- University Relations: Respond to inquiries from the media and coordinate media presence on campus if necessary.
- Other: Other University personnel will be notified if the DOS is aware that the student was connected in some way to a certain program, activity or office on campus.

### Posthumous Degrees and Certificates

The student's academic department may recommend that the degree be awarded posthumously. The recommendation must be approved by the dean of the student's college and the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (VCAA). If the student was pursuing a certificate

in addition to a degree, or pursuing a certificate only, the decision to approve a recommendation to posthumously award the certificate will be made on a case-by-case basis depending on the total number of credits earned and the number earned at UH Hilo. In all instances the student must have been in good academic standing at the time of his/her death.

When the VCAA approves the recommendation, he/she should notify the Office of the Registrar so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Arrangements to be made by the Registrar include ordering a diploma and diploma cover for the student and making a notation on the student's transcript that a degree and/or certificate was awarded posthumously. Costs related to the diploma will be covered by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs.

The VCAA may invite the family to come to the next commencement ceremony to be presented with the student's diploma. In these instances, the VCAA should contact the commencement coordinator so the appropriate arrangements can be made, which may include arranging for special recognition of the student and his/her family at the ceremony, listing the student's name in the graduation program if possible, and arranging for reserved seating and parking for family members.

Alternatively, the VCAA may wish to invite the family of the student to come to the University for a private meeting, at which the family will be presented with the diploma by the VCAA and/or dean of the college, or mail the diploma with a letter to the family.

Approved by:

Chancellor Bonnie Irwin

Date: 8/4/2022

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bonnie Irwin', is positioned above a horizontal line.

**APPENDIX A**

**DECEASED STUDENT SUMMARY RECORD**

Student's full name: \_\_\_\_\_

UH ID number: \_\_\_\_\_

Local address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of hall and room number if student lived on-campus: \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Family Member Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to student: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Death: \_\_\_\_\_

Cause of Death (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

Funeral or Memorial Services Arrangements (date, location, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Major(s) and/or Certificate and Degree pursuing and College: \_\_\_\_\_

Academic Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Class Standing: \_\_\_\_\_

International Student: ( Y / N ) If yes, from: \_\_\_\_\_

Athlete: ( Y / N ) If yes, sport(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Clubs/Organizations (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

Employee at UH Hilo: ( Y / N ) If yes, department: \_\_\_\_\_

Financial Aid recipient: ( Y / N )

Outstanding financial obligations: ( Y / N ) If yes, describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Attach a copy of the student's academic record to date, including courses currently enrolled in and the names of faculty members teaching those courses.