



Inspiring Innovation and Discovery

Protocol for the Response to a Student Death

Responsible Executive: **Associate Vice-
President (Students & Learning) and Dean of
Students**

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

PREAMBLE

1. Students are valued members of our University community. The death of a student may have some or significant impact on individuals close to the student or individuals who have recently experienced a death.
2. The purpose of this Protocol is to facilitate a co-ordinated University response to the death of a student.
3. The Office of Student Affairs is the central point of contact and coordination of activities related to the death of a student.
4. A response to the death of a student will always occur regardless of whether the death occurred on or off campus, the nature of the death, or the time of year. The nature of the tragedy will determine the level of communication and response required.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

5. These Guiding Principles represent our commitment to respond to the death of a student with:
 - a) **Compassion:** a response must consider the impact on the University community (fellow students, faculty, staff), and the family.
 - b) **Respect and Privacy:** a response must respect the wishes of the student's family in regards to how the death is communicated, how much information is released around the nature of death, and who communicates with the family and how.
 - c) **Safety:** the safety of those affected by the death must be considered, and a Postvention response strategy put in place in order to respond to the unique considerations involved in a death caused by suicide.
 - d) **Timeliness:** a response to the death must occur in a timely manner. The death may be sudden necessitating an emergency response, or the University may learn of the death after some time. It is important to respond to the death to the University community, as well as to the student's family as soon as possible.

SCOPE

6. This Protocol applies to all McMaster University students (e.g. undergraduate, graduate, part-time, McMaster English Language Development (MELD) diploma students, Undergraduate MD students, international and exchange students).

MEMORIALS AND COMMEMORATIONS

7. Every member of the University community is valued and important. Any loss of life of any member of the community is tragic and will have an impact on those around us. For this reason, the University has established a day to remember members of our community that have passed away. Please see Statement on University Memorial Service.

SECTION II: ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

ASSOCIATE VICE-PRESIDENT (STUDENTS & LEARNING) AND DEAN OF STUDENTS

8. The Dean of Students is responsible for the coordination of activities related to the death of a student.
9. The Dean of Students (or designate) is the Chair of the Response Team, and activates the team if appropriate.
10. Specific accountabilities may include, but not limited to:
 - a) Primary contact with family (providing support, assistance navigating University processes, arranging accommodation or parking for the family, if necessary)
 - b) Liaising with Faculties and departments (academic and financial matters)
 - c) Determining the student's status (e.g. undergraduate, graduate, international, exchange, residence student, etc.)
 - d) Obtaining a death certificate (if necessary)
 - e) Representing the University at a funeral or Celebration of Life service
 - f) Consulting with Intercultural Affairs Advisor in regards to cultural protocols
 - g) Liaising with student organizations in regards to connections with student clubs
 - h) Consulting with family on message to the community

Members of the Response Team may include:

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS (CAPA)

11. Official spokesperson with the media and external community.
12. In consultation with Hamilton Police Service (HPS) and McMaster Security Services, determine what/if any information is released surrounding the circumstances and/or the student's status at the University.

FACULTIES

13. Review student's academic record (ie, program, level, courses completed) to determine appropriate action to be taken regarding the student's currently enrolled courses. Depending on date of death, this may include retroactively dropping, cancellation, or in consultation with faculty members, assigning a grade based on completed work.
14. If requested (and appropriate), investigate the possibility of granting a posthumous degree.
15. Serve as point of contact with appropriate faculty members/course instructors, staff and students.
16. Liaise with Student Affairs regarding communication.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SUPPORT SERVICES (EOHSS)

17. Confirm whether the death was related to a sanctioned event.
18. Assess for reporting purposes under the Occupational Health and Safety Act or the University's Insurer. Refer to RMM 1000.

HOUSING AND CONFERENCE SERVICES (HCS)

19. In consultation with the AVP Students & Learning and Dean of Students and Communications and Public Affairs, develop a communication and notification plan for the residence community, when deemed appropriate.
20. Coordinate the removal of belongings and refund of fees.
21. Point of contact for residence students affected by the student death, facilitating access to support services and resources.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES (ISS)

22. Follow procedures as outlined in the Student Affairs Response Plan Appendix G-3.
 - a) Notify the relevant embassy/consulate of the death
 - b) Liaise with Citizenship and Immigration Canada
 - c) Provide all relevant information and support to the Dean of Students

PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

23. Arrange for lowering of the flag at the time of the funeral or memorial service.
24. Send a letter of condolence to the family.

SECURITY AND PARKING SERVICES

25. McMaster Security is the first responder in the event of an on campus death.

STUDENT ACCOUNTS

26. Coordinate refund and settle the student account.
27. Generate tax notices.

STUDENT FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS

28. Contact provincial and/or federal government student aid representatives (e.g. OSAP).
29. Advise Student Affairs to communicate with family that government student aid representatives (e.g. OSAP) have been contacted on their behalf.
30. Make final adjustments to University aid and award funding and disburses appropriately.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND CASE MANAGEMENT (SSCM)

31. Assist with assessing impact to the campus community. Based upon the assessment, creates a support and outreach strategy to respond to the needs of the University community. Review and update the Resource Guide: A Coordinated Response to a Student Death on Campus.
32. In the absence of the Chair, the Director of the SSCMO will act as chair of the Response Team.
33. Coordinate crisis intervention support resources that may be needed (e.g. additional crisis counsellors).

STUDENT UNIONS/ASSOCIATIONS

34. Assist with campus communication, if directed by the University.

35. Assist with assessing impact on campus community.

STUDENT WELLNESS CENTRE (SWC)

36. Provide counselling support to students affected by the loss and referrals to outside agencies as necessary.

UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR

37. Notify University community of the death (e.g. Student Affairs, Student Accounts, HCS, Alumni, President, student's Faculty, Parking, and Hospitality Services), Student Wellness Centre.

38. Make all appropriate changes to the student record (note: School of Graduate Studies will graduate student record).

SECTION III: NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES

39. The nature of the death, the time of year, and the location of the death will determine the notification procedures.

40. Reporting procedures:

Any member of the University community, upon learning of the death of a student, will notify:

Non-catastrophic death (e.g. illness or not recent):

i) Call the Student Affairs Office at (905) 525-9140, Ext.27455

Catastrophic death (e.g. motor vehicle death, suicide):

j) Call McMaster Security Services at (905) 525 -9140, Ext.24281

SECTION IV: RESPONSE TEAM

41. In some cases, the Response Team may need to be activated, for example:

- a) The death occurred on campus
- b) The death was sudden and a result of an accident
- c) The death was by suicide

42. The Dean of Students, as chair of the Response Team, will determine whether to activate the Response Team. Designate chair, Director of the Student Support and Case Management Office.

43. The Dean of Students will communicate and keep the Crisis Management Team advised of activities related to the incident.

44. The Response Team is fluid and dependent upon the nature of the incident, and may include representatives from:

- a) Assistant Dean of the Faculty
- b) Communications and Public Affairs
- c) Student Support and Case Management

- d) Student Wellness Centre
- e) Consultants on an as needed basis (Housing and Conference Services, International Student Services, student groups, Indigenous Student Services, Equity and Inclusion Office, Chaplaincy, Intercultural Affairs Advisor, etc. as required)

45. The Dean of Students will determine whether support for the University community is necessary and will activate the Community Support and Outreach Coordinator.

SECTION V: COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND OUTREACH

46. The Director of the SSCMO is the Coordinator of the community support and outreach to provide a response to support the University community. The Resource Guide: A Coordinated Response to a Student Death on Campus provides an overview of key considerations and best practices when responding to a death of a student.

47. The Director of the SSCMO assesses the impact of the student death, creates a comprehensive response strategy, provides key considerations for communication and crisis intervention, and other forms of assistance to those affected by the student death in order to:

- a) Facilitate the grieving or adjustment process
- b) Stabilize the environment
- c) Reduce the risk of negative behaviours
- d) Limit the risk of further suicides through contagion through application of best practices of a postvention response.