



## NORTH CAROLINA A&T STATE UNIVERSITY

### PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO STUDENT DEATH

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (“NC A&T” or “University”) strives to respond in a sensitive and caring manner for every member of our community. The death of a student affects the entire community, particularly the family and friends of the deceased. These procedures are intended to establish guidelines to help faculty, staff, administrators, and the University community to respond in a sensitive and caring manner with addressing a student’s death. While some campus officials play more active roles in responding to student crises, it is important for all University faculty and staff to have a working knowledge of these procedures. Although the University strives to respond in a consistent manner, the specific facts and circumstances of any crisis may lead the University to adjust its actions to the specific circumstances.

#### **Section 1.0 General Guidelines**

- (a) In the event of a student’s death, the procedures outlined below will be followed as general guidelines. Realizing that death can occur under a number of different circumstances (accident, intentional, natural causes, etc.), there is great need for flexibility and good judgment. Considering the very sensitive and unpredictable nature of a death, no procedure fully describes all the steps that should be taken in absolute detail. Implementation of these procedures should be guided by the essential communication needs required in these situations, empathy, sensitivity and support for the bereaved, common sense, and the need to preserve important evidence.
- (b) Out of respect for their families and those closest to students who have died, it is important to note that under State law, NC A&T must rely on a medical examiner to determine an official cause of death. When a death occurs off campus, the University may not be informed of the cause. From working with students’ families and others affected by a loss of life, we learn much that alerts us to areas of concern and greatly informs how we provide health and safety support, as well as grief support and resources for our community.

#### **Section 2.0 Notification of Student Death**

- (a) The Greensboro Police Department and North Carolina A&T State University’s Police Department (“UPD”) will investigate any death on campus, regardless of the deceased’s affiliation with the University.
- (b) UPD may request assistance from other local, state, or federal law enforcement partners.
- (c) In the event of a death, the area where the deceased is found will be restricted while the investigation is ongoing and no one, including the media, will be permitted in the restricted area until police, the county medical examiner, or other officials approve.

### **Section 2.0.1 Deaths on Campus**

- (a) If a seriously injured or deceased individual is discovered on campus, the area where the death occurred should not be disturbed, unless rendering emergency first aid. Call 911 immediately. The dispatcher will notify the Associate Vice Chancellor for Police and Public Safety/Chief of Police.
- (b) If possible, secure the area, being careful to touch as little as possible. If there are multiple individuals present and it is safe to do so, someone should remain at the location to keep others from disturbing the scene while someone else calls the police.

### **Section 2.0.2 Notifications**

- (a) Once notified of the death on campus, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Police and Public Safety/Chief of Police or designee will ensure that officers respond to the location immediately to secure the scene and begin an investigation and notify the following as applicable and appropriate:
  - (1) Chancellor;
  - (2) Chief of Staff;
  - (3) Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance;
  - (4) Emergency Management Director;
  - (5) Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs;
  - (6) Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs;
  - (7) Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs, Risk, & Compliance and General Counsel;
  - (8) Associate Vice Chancellor for University Relations;
  - (9) State Bureau of Investigation; and
  - (10) UNC System Office.
- (b) The student's family will be contacted by UPD or the local police if a student dies on or near the University campus. UPD will coordinate with community police agencies to contact the family in person.
- (c) The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs will notify the following as applicable and appropriate:
  - (1) Dean of Students;
  - (2) Director of Intercollegiate Athletics (only if deceased is a student-athlete);
  - (3) Executive Director for Housing and Residence Life (if a residential student);
  - (4) Executive Director for Counseling Services; and
  - (5) Executive Director of the Student Health Center.
- (d) The Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs will notify the following as applicable and appropriate:
  - (1) University Registrar;
  - (2) Director of the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships;
  - (3) Relevant academic dean and department leadership;
  - (4) Faculty of deceased student; and
  - (5) Vice Chancellor for Information Technology Services/Chief Information Officer.

### Section 2.0.3 Deaths during University-Sponsored Travel

- (a) If a student dies during University-sponsored travel, the University staff member accompanying the trip should immediately contact the local emergency services and the law enforcement agency in the area where they are located.
- (b) As soon as possible after notifying local law enforcement, the University staff member must contact the University's Associate Vice Chancellor for Police and Public Safety/Chief of Police and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. UPD should be contacted by phone at 336-334-7128 or 336-334-7675, email at [upd@ncat.edu](mailto:upd@ncat.edu), or in person in Ward Hall, 406 Laurel Street on the main campus. The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs may be contacted by phone at (336) 334-7696, email at [studaff@ncat.edu](mailto:studaff@ncat.edu), or in person in Murphy Hall, Suite 100 on the main campus. In the case of a study-abroad experience, the program leader or representative of the host institution must also contact the Office of International Affairs at 336-334-7551 or [uia@ncat.edu](mailto:uia@ncat.edu) and the US Embassy or Consulate for the relevant country.
- (c) As soon as possible given the needs of the case, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Police and Public Safety/Chief of Police will confirm the individual's student status and notify appropriate University administrators, faculty, and staff, which may include the following:
  - (1) Chancellor;
  - (2) Chief of Staff;
  - (3) Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance;
  - (4) Emergency Management Director;
  - (5) Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs;
  - (6) Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs;
  - (7) Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs, Risk, and Compliance/General Counsel;
  - (8) Associate Vice Chancellor for University Relations; and
  - (9) UNC System Office.
- (d) The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs or designee will notify the following individuals as applicable and appropriate:
  - (1) Dean of Students;
  - (2) Director of Athletics (only if deceased is a student-athlete);
  - (3) Executive Director for Housing and Residence Life (if a residential student);
  - (4) Executive Director for Counseling Services; and
  - (5) Executive Director of the Student Health Center.
- (e) The Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs or designee will notify the following as applicable and appropriate:
  - (1) University Registrar;
  - (2) Director of the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships;
  - (3) Student Accounts;
  - (4) Relevant academic dean and department leadership;
  - (5) Faculty of deceased student;
  - (6) Faculty Senate President; and
  - (7) Vice Chancellor for Information Technology Services/Chief Information Officer;

- (f) Other representatives may be included, as appropriate, on a case-by-case basis. These representatives will work together to ensure that the campus responds to the death in a unified and appropriate manner. In the event of a known suicide, the team will also assess postvention activities (to facilitate healing, mitigate negative effects of exposure to suicide, and oversee prevention efforts to support those at high-risk after exposure) and to examine the effectiveness of the University's responses.

### **Section 3.0 Media Relations**

The Office of University Relations will coordinate media responses. Under no circumstances should any University employee make any public comment or statement about an individual's cause of death to the media or on behalf of the University, unless specifically authorized to do so by University administrators. This also includes posting messages or making comments on social and electronic media.

### **Section 4.0 Cause of Death**

- (a) Under North Carolina law, only a medical examiner has the authority to determine the cause and manner of an individual's death. In the event of the death of a student on or near campus, all requests for information from news media should be referred to University Relations at 336-256-0863.
- (b) No University employee or individual acting on behalf of the University should discuss a potential cause of death or confidential/private matters related to the incident with non-University officials or employees who are not involved in responding to the situation. This does not preclude discussions with University legal counsel or for appropriate University employees from providing care and support to impacted individuals without disclosure of confidential or sensitive information.
- (c) The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs will designate a primary and single point of contact, for the family in navigating University-related business and contacts with University faculty, staff, or students.

### **Section 5.0 Campus-Wide Notifications**

- (a) The Chancellor, in consultation with the Cabinet and others as appropriate, will determine what, if any, notifications will be made to the larger campus community.
- (b) In accordance with University policies, UPD will only issue an Aggie Alert if it reasonably believes that there is an ongoing threat to the University community.
- (c) As a matter of general practice, the University will send campus-wide notifications of student deaths. The University will work through localized departments and offices to assist the broader community and communicate the availability of support resources.
- (d) The University recognizes that social and electronic media allow for fast distribution of information and misinformation. Rumors or speculation about the circumstances of a student

death, including the cause of death, may begin circulating before any official information is or can be released by the University, law enforcement, and/or the medical examiner. In those cases, the University may need to address issues related to campus safety and/or student mental health for the overall well-being of the campus community through targeted outreach or a campus-wide communication.

- (e) In the event that the Chancellor and Cabinet determine that campus-wide communications are necessary and issues a campus-wide announcement:
  - (1) Cause of death (if known) will not be released;
  - (2) Additional information related to the death must not be shared until family or next of kin is notified and/or until the related investigation is completed;
  - (3) The University will not comment about a specific student's death; and
  - (4) In recognition of the potentially harmful impact, any campus-wide communication will not associate an individual student's death with suicide.
- (f) The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs or designee will communicate with families and impacted individuals to ensure that they are aware of these efforts.

### **Section 6.0 Campus Memorials**

- (a) The University may host official campus memorials when appropriate.
- (b) If a student organization or the student's family wish to pursue a student-specific vigil or memorial, the Dean of Students or designee may provide support resources as appropriate. If University staff are made aware that an informal memorial is occurring, in the interest of student safety and in consultation with the Dean of Students' office, a staff member will reach out to the organizers of the event to offer guidance. Support from the Dean of Students' office may facilitate the safety of vulnerable individuals in attendance at these informal memorials.

### **Section 7.0 Providing Community Support and Resources**

- (a) The Office of Counseling Services will coordinate support provided to individuals and groups affected by a student death. This may include providing onsite, in-person support services for directly-affected students, telehealth services, or virtual services.
- (b) It is a natural impulse to want a simple reason as to why a student death occurred, which might involve blaming someone close to the deceased. Student deaths may be attributable to a variety of factors, including accidents; physical, mental, or emotional illness; substance abuse; homicide; and suicide. As appropriate, interventions should involve an explanation of the complexity of death and associated factors such as suicide.
- (c) It is important to remember that those with health concerns such as depression, anxiety, severe substance abuse, severe personality disorders and psychosis, or those who have previously lost someone to suicide or who have experienced/are experiencing suicidal thoughts themselves, even if not connected to the deceased, may also experience a difficult time managing grief and emotions. Whenever possible, efforts will be made to identify close student contacts of the deceased student and connect them with support resources.

- (d) Outreach services to facilitate support and resources to students will be extended, as appropriate, by an array of departments such as Counseling Services, the Office of Accessibility Resources, Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and other units.
- (e) When engaging with students following the death of a student, University staff will:
- Make timely contact with known friends of the deceased student.
  - Encourage expression of feelings.
  - Promote peer support among friends of the victim.
  - Encourage resumption of routine as soon as possible.

### **Section 7.0.1 For Families**

The Dean of Students Office (or the assigned Primary Contact) will serve as the main NC A&T contact for the families of deceased students. As requested or desired by the family, the Dean of Students or designee may assist with the following:

- Coordinating with other campus departments to conclude University business (e.g., Cashier, Registrar, Scholarships and Student Aid); and
- Collecting and retrieving personal belongings.

### **Section 7.0.2 For the Campus Community**

(a) Responding to the death of a student is a challenging undertaking requiring care and sensitivity. Any member of the campus community affected by the death of a student is encouraged to seek support as needed.

(b) For immediate support, students may contact:

Counseling Services, 336-334-7727 or <https://www.ncat.edu/campus-life/student-affairs/departments/counseling-services/for-students.php>

Student Health Center, 336-334-7880 or <https://www.ncat.edu/campus-life/student-affairs/departments/health-services/index.php>

Office of the Dean of Students, 336-334-7791 or <https://www.ncat.edu/campus-life/student-affairs/departments/dean-of-students/index.php>

(c) For immediate support, employees may contact:

Employee Assistance Program, 866-511-3373 or <https://hub.ncat.edu/administration/human-resources/documents/benefits/EAPComPsychFlyer.pdf>

**HISTORY:** Effective October 1, 2023

**OWNER:** Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

**RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Office of the Dean of Students