



# RESPONSE TO THE DEATH OF A STUDENT PROTOCOL

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## PURPOSE STATEMENT

In the event of the death of an NIC student, certain procedures must be followed to ensure that the College's response is compassionate and respectful, accurate information is released in a timely fashion, and that the College implements necessary administrative procedures and support initiatives efficiently and effectively.

## SCOPE AND APPLICATION

These procedures are applicable to the death of a currently\* enrolled NIC student, on or off-campus, while recognizing that there may be differing priorities depending on factors such as manner of death.

\*The response to the death of a former student will be assessed on a case by case basis. All deaths of former students need to be reported to the Registrar to action student record updates.

## PRINCIPLES

1. NIC will ensure the accurate and timely delivery of information as set out in the attached procedures or required in the specific circumstances.
2. NIC will demonstrate respect for the family of the deceased student by adhering to the family's wishes in terms of the information disclosed to the College community.
3. NIC will only disclose information in compliance with all relevant legislation including the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) and NIC Policy 1-01 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy. Where there is a conflict between these Procedures and FOIPPA, the legislation will govern.
4. NIC will support the well-being of the campus community through the provision of counselling and other relevant support services.

## PROTOCOLS

1. Response to the Report of a Student Death On or Off-Campus

- 1.1 Receiving the report of a student death:

Designated members of the Critical Response Team (CRT) will act on behalf of the College and will coordinate the College's response to the death of a student and be a liaison with the family/next of kin/impacted persons. The CRT lead or designate will communicate additional roles and responsibilities to other members of the College community as required.

1.1.1 A report of a student death should be conveyed to the lead or designate of the Critical Response Team (CRT) as quickly as possible. The CRT consists of:

- Director Student Affairs (DSA) (lead)
- Vice President, Student & Community Engagement
- Associate Director, Community and Public Affairs
- Associate Director, Student Life
- Registrar
- Director, International Education
- Director, Facilities, Safety & Security (if the death occurs on-campus)

1.1.2 If a death occurs during College sponsored travel, the College staff member accompanying the trip should immediately contact local emergency services and the local law enforcement agency. The College staff member will then connect with their NIC contact and/or the CRT lead.

1.1.3 If a death occurs while a student is studying abroad, the program leader or representative of host institution will contact the Director, International Education.

1.1.4 The lead or designate of the CRT will initiate the Critical Response Procedures.

## 2. Immediate Response to a Death of a Student On-Campus

2.1 In the event of a death of a student on-campus, the primary responder will contact the RCMP, paramedics and/or fire department. Following the notification of emergency services, the primary responder will alert the Director, Facilities, Safety & Security. The Director, Facilities, Safety & Security will initiate the appropriate emergency procedures. This may include, but is not limited to, notification of law enforcement, activation of the Risk Assessment and Prevention Team (RAPT), temporary closure of a building/area, and notification of the Crisis Response Team (CRT).

2.2 The Director, Facilities, Safety & Security will notify the CRT lead or designate who will initiate the critical response procedure beginning with:

- a. the drafting of an initial email communication from the Associate Director, Community & Public Affairs to the impacted campus community stating that a death has occurred on campus and is being investigated (if applicable and in compliance with all relevant legislation including the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) and NIC policy 1.01 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy), and
- b. initiation and communication of counselling and other appropriate supports.

2.3 Initial communication to the immediate family is the responsibility of the RCMP. The college will not release information prematurely to respect this process and family members (see 3.3.2).

### 3. Critical Response Procedure

#### 3.1 Confirmation of Information

3.1.1 Upon receiving the initial report, the CRT lead will obtain the following information (where possible):

- a. the full name of deceased person,
- b. date of birth,
- c. where/when/how the death occurred (if information is available),
- d. whether the RCMP has been notified, and if so, the name of police officer, and file/case number (as required).

3.1.2 The CRT lead or designate will determine, through contact with the coroner and/or RCMP, that proper notification of the family/next of kin has taken place.

#### 3.2 Delegation of Roles and Responsibilities within the CRT

3.2.1 Using the checklist (appendix A), the CRT lead or designate will assign roles, responsibilities and timelines to the CRT and College community, and will ensure regular updates to members of the Leadership Team (LT).

The Leadership Team consists of:

- President and Chief Executive Officer
- Vice President, Academic
- Vice President, Finance & College Services
- Vice President, Students & Community Engagement
- Associate Vice President, People, Equity & Inclusion
- Associate Vice President, College Experience
- Director, College Governance and Strategy

#### 3.3 Communication

3.3.1 Upon a report of the death of a student, the CRT will determine those who 'need to know' from the list below. If the report is unconfirmed, this will be clearly stated in the primary communication. Once the report has been confirmed, a further communication will be sent out to advise that the 'Response to the Death of a Student Protocol' will be initiated. The list consists of:

- a. members of the Leadership Team;
- b. Dean, Director, Associate Dean and/or Chair of the deceased student (who will then notify faculty members and staff associated with the student on a need to know basis);
- c. Campus Administrator(s);
- d. Director, Facilities, Safety & Security (if applicable); and
- e. others as appropriate.

- 3.3.2 After the official notification has been made by the authorities, the CRT lead or designate will determine if the student had a student loan and/or any coverage under the Health and Dental Plan. They will then contact the family/next of kin (in person, if possible) to express condolences, establish a link as being the official contact person for the College and offer assistance as appropriate. This may include follow-up information pertaining to loan and H&D requirements.
- 3.3.3 If the nearest relative as defined in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Regulation gives the College permission to release information, an email will be drafted by the Associate Director, Community & Public Affairs, in consultation with the CRT and sent out to the College community. The email will include the student's name, program and year of study and any other appropriate information released by the family (see Appendix B for sample communication). The email will also contain condolences from the College as well as information on how those affected can obtain counselling and support if required.
- 3.3.4 If the nearest relative of the deceased does not wish to disclose the manner of death, communication might state: "The family has requested that information about the circumstances of death not be shared at this time."
- 3.3.5 In the case where the College is asked for public comment prior to obtaining consent from the nearest relative, the designated college spokesperson is the Associate Director, Community & Public Affairs, who will publicly explain that the College does not release such information without the consent of the nearest relative.
- 3.3.6 The CRT will draft a formal letter of condolence to be signed by an appropriate member of the senior administration (normally the President).

#### 3.4 Support

- 3.4.1 The CRT will arrange support services for students and staff (in their first language whenever possible) for the period immediately following the death of a student (DSA for student support and VP, People, Equity & Inclusion for employee support). This may include contacting EFAP, counsellors, booking a room(s), and communicating the information to the College community.
- 3.4.2 In the event of a death by suicide, other members of the campus community may be at an increased risk of suicide. In addition to general counselling services, counsellors may reach out to students known to be at risk. These may include individuals close to the deceased and those who are already vulnerable to depression and/or suicidal ideation (see Appendix C for a list of high-risk groups and individuals).

- 3.4.3 Additional support services may be contacted and made available as required; for example, translation service, specialized trauma counsellors and spiritual resources.
- 3.4.4 Faculty members should expect to be approached by students affected by the death of a fellow student. Along with other members of the campus community, faculty members can play an important role in helping students who are struggling with the loss of a friend or classmate. Suggestions for faculty to support students in crises following a death include:
- a. consult with appropriate offices on campus such as the Director, Student Affairs and Counselling Services, and
  - b. identify counselling resources for students who are struggling.

*It is important to facilitate the grieving process as well as stabilize the environment by reducing the highly emotional tone of the campus, bringing it back to its more ordinary state.*

- 3.4.5 Faculty may, in collaboration with the dean director and/or program chair, provide in-class supports including:
- a. recommending counselling to students in distress,
  - b. extending assignment deadlines,
  - c. providing make-up work or exams,
  - d. excluding one or more test grades from the final grade, and
  - e. recommending a medical withdrawal.
- 3.4.6 The CRT will provide a general reminder of all support services. The use of the Red Folder, *Supporting Students in Crisis*, will be well publicized to intended audiences and communicated through email and social media.
- 3.4.7 Responders, including counsellors and other support services, are not immune from grief, and will be encouraged to manage self and mutual care.

### 3.5 Follow-Up/De-brief

- 3.5.1 The CRT team will communicate regularly (in person, through email or by telephone) during the initial days and weeks following the death of a student to provide updates and plan on-going support and information as required.
- 3.5.2 All records will be kept in the Judicial Affairs database.
- 3.5.3 Where appropriate, a critical incident review may be facilitated by the CRT chair to review these procedures. Additional debriefing exercises will also be encouraged among those directly involved and impacted.

### 3.6 Confidentiality

3.6.1 The CRT will ensure compliance with the Freedom of Information/Protection of Privacy legislation throughout this process.

### 3.7 Posthumous Academic Program Credential

3.7.1 A student who, upon death, has not completed the necessary requirements to qualify for the academic program credential but has substantially completed the requirements of the program and was expected to complete the necessary requirements, may be issued a posthumous credential at any time upon approval from the registrar after consultation with the dean. Exception may include programs with externally mandated curriculum. When closing the student record, SRO will run a grad audit and escalate to the Registrar for internal discussion if the deceased student is one or two courses or in the middle of their last term and would have graduated if they completed the term.

3.7.2 When a posthumous credential is issued, a notation “posthumous” will be recorded on the student transcript but will not appear on the credential.

**Link to checklist document:** [Click here](#)

#### **Links and Related Policies, Documents and Websites:**

BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act ([FOIPPA](#))

Field School Faculty Lead Handbook (International Education)

NIC Adventure Guiding Program: Emergency Procedures for Field Activities (off-campus)

Risk Assessment and Prevention Team – [RAPT Terms of Reference](#)

Student Case Management Team – [SCMT Terms of Reference](#)

#### **Cross Reference:**

NIC Policy #1-01 Freedom of Information and Protection of

Privacy NIC Policy #1-20 Code of Ethical Conduct

NIC Policy #2-08 Human Rights

NIC Policy #2-10 Protection of Employees from Violence in the Workplace

NIC Policy #2-15 Occupational Health & Safety

NIC Policy #3-34 Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response

#### **Resources**

Appalachian State University – Student Death Protocol

<https://policy.appstate.edu/images/b/bc/Student-Death-Protocol.pdf>

Higher Education Mental Health Alliance (2014). *Postvention: A Guide for Response to Suicide on College Campuses*. [https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=http://hemha.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/postvention\\_guide.pdf](https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=http://hemha.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/postvention_guide.pdf)

Queen’s University – Student Death Protocol (2016)

University of Guelph – Protocol for Responding to the Death of a Student (2017)

Vancouver Island University – Procedure 41.13.002 Death of a Student (2010)