

Communicating About a Student Death

WPI keeps the health and wellbeing of this community as top priority. We have learned a great deal about best practices for communicating about the death of a student, regardless of cause. Of particular note, experts agree that how we present information about suicide can increase or decrease risk. This kind of communication is so fraught that [media have been educated about the potentially harmful implications of those stories, and instructed about how to responsibly report on the topic](#) – guidance that WPI also follows.

- 1. WPI is committed to doing what is best for our students, faculty, and staff. Based upon expert guidance and community feedback, the university has changed our approach to how, when, and with whom we share and discuss news of a student’s death.**
 - We no longer send community-wide messages.
 - We reach out directly to those students, faculty, and staff most impacted by a loss. This includes notifying deans, department heads, project advisors, and other academic and administrative employees—particularly those who are student-facing—whose insight, support, and counsel are critical.
- 2. This protocol balances competing needs—an individual’s need to know of a loss close to them, and the need to protect the mental health of the larger community.**
 - Mental health experts are concerned about the negative impact broader community emails have on many of our more vulnerable students.
 - At the same time, many students—and faculty and staff—tell us that *not* communicating important information can allow rumors to spread and cause anxiety.
- 3. We are maintaining other best practices, including:**
 - Providing outreach and resources to our community.
 - Refraining from responding to rumor or gossip on social media.
 - Private message to direct users to the right resources
 - Encourage direct outreach to the right offices and resources
 - Being transparent and providing basic facts—and connections with expert external sources, as appropriate—if external media seek information.

How You Can Help:

- We may not always be able to identify or reach everyone impacted, so those in the know can and should share important information in helpful ways to people who want or need to know it.
- Should you happen to hear or see (most often via social media posts) rumors, misinformation, and/or anxiety, please provide helpful information, insights, and support.
- Urge others to be kind, thoughtful, and careful to avoid speculation.

- Reinforce that no one should struggle alone, and that asking for help is a sign of health and strength.
- Remind others that support is available through multiple pathways and direct people to information about resources: <https://www.wpi.edu/student-experience/resources/be-well-together>
- If you are seriously concerned about a student, submit an [I'm Concerned About a Student](#) form, or walk them to the SDCC at 16 Einhorn Road, or call 508-831-5540.