



# WPI

## Overview: WPI Response in the Event of a Student Death

The death of a student is emotionally difficult and stressful for students, faculty, and staff. It is important that WPI respond with compassion, professionalism, and support for those affected, recognizing that individuals react to death in different ways.

The response is led by the Dean of Students Office and includes Campus Police, Student Development & Counseling and other relevant stakeholders working together in the early hours after the university is notified. The response team works in concentric circles with primary focus on the student's family, followed by outreach to immediately impacted students (friends, classmates, teammates) and other community members. This is an iterative and non-linear process, which means that often an announcement will be delayed in order to ensure our teams have time to meet with and provide support for those most impacted.

Included here is a summary of the actions that may be taken in the event of a student death. Each situation will be different and nuanced. The response team will make choices that are consistent with its duty of care based on the facts of each situation.

### Immediate Response Within the First 12 to 24 Hours

- A single point-person contacts the student's family promptly and compassionately and serves as a family liaison to help with travel, belongings, and other needs.
- The Student Development & Counseling Center staff are mobilized on site to support students.
- The team identifies impacted students and reaches out to inform them about their fellow student's passing (e.g., current and former roommates, teammates, club members, dating partners, students present at the event or who arrived soon after, resident advisors, etc.)
- In collaboration with the Provost's Office and Dean of Students Office team, WPI notifies directly impacted employees, such as the student's academic advisors, project advisors, current faculty, department head, coaches, club advisors, campus job supervisor, etc.
- The team provides guidance and support to the student's current faculty about how to talk about the loss with classmates.
- The team also communicates with offices on campus to enable necessary administrative actions to ensure all record keeping and accounts are addressed.

### Support for Students and Community in the Following Days

- In collaboration with the Student Development & Counseling Center, WPI arranges meetings to inform members of teams, workgroups, and organizations regarding the student's death.
- The Dean of Students Office coordinates with campus counseling, clergy, and support services to offer counseling for friends, roommates, classmates, and others directly impacted.
- The Dean of Students Office assigns a case manager from the CARE Team or Dean of Students Office for each immediately affected student to check on them on an ongoing basis and offer supportive measures, such as advocacy for academic support, relocation assistance, counseling referrals.

- The Dean of Students Office or Academic Advising Office communicates with faculty directly to arrange for academic flexibility for impacted students.
- In some cases, the Dean of Students Office communicates with the families of affected students.
- The Dean of Students Office arranges for transportation to memorial services for directly impacted students where possible and appropriate.
- If desired by the family, the provost begins the process for requesting the granting of a posthumous degree.

### **Expectations Around Communication**

- Our first communication is always to the family. In some circumstances, it may be difficult to reach the family of the deceased. In these cases, the university will refrain from releasing or confirming the deceased student's name until we are sure the family has been notified by WPI or another responsible authority such as police.
- Once all immediately impacted individuals are identified and notified, WPI will send a community message sharing that there was a loss in the community with information about resources that assist campus community members.
- Out of respect for their families and those closest to students who have died, the university does not broadly announce students' names or causes of death. Any information sharing must balance the family's wishes and privacy interests with the community's desire for information.
- All media requests should be directed to Marketing and Communications. Only authorized university employees should speak on behalf of the university or make comments or statements about an individual's death to the media. University employees may, of course, acknowledge the loss when providing care and support to impacted individuals; sensitive information should not be disclosed. A death may occur under circumstances that require a deviation from the standard practice outlined above.

### **How You Can Help**

Affected students may ask to miss class and/or postpone some of their academic, athletic, or work responsibilities. Faculty members, coaches, and job supervisors are encouraged to extend grace, compassion, and consideration to students in these cases.

It is important to facilitate the grieving process as well as stabilize the campus environment:

- Handle student requests for consideration on a case-by-case basis.
- You are discouraged from canceling scheduled activities for everyone. For some, healing comes from maintaining normal routines.
- If a funeral or memorial service is scheduled at the same time as a student's existing commitments, faculty and supervisors are encouraged to be flexible.

Along with other members of the campus community, faculty and staff members can play an important role in helping students who are struggling with the loss of a friend or classmate. Supporting students in crisis after a death will vary based on the individual circumstances and may include any or all the following:

- The Dean of Students may not always be able to identify or reach everyone impacted, so once you have been made aware of a death, you can and should share resource information in helpful ways to people who share they are impacted, such as counseling resources and academic support resources.
- If you are 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. If your concern is urgent, please call Campus Police at 508-831-5555.
- 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>
- Extend assignment deadlines or provide make-up work or examinations.
- Before talking about the death in class, faculty should consider reviewing "[Supporting Students through Challenging Times: Resources for Faculty & Staff](#)" or consult with the Dean of Students or the Student Development & Counseling Center so the faculty member may benefit from guidance regarding how to have this conversation and what questions to expect.
- Please refrain from engaging with rumor or gossip, including on social media, which could include AI-generated news reports that are inaccurate. Instead, private message users to direct them to the right offices and resources.
- You may receive calls regarding a student death from parents or alumni. If the caller is seeking resources or has concerns about their own student's wellbeing, provide them with information for the Student Development & Counseling Center or Dean of Students. If asked about specific details regarding the death, let the caller know we are honoring the family's privacy as well as federal privacy laws and not disclosing details.