

Georgia Institute of Technology
Campus Death Notification
Revised: January 2020

Assumptions:

- It is important and necessary for the campus community to be informed of the death of an individual as soon as it is reasonably possible.
- When the death involves a student, the Vice President/Dean of Students will act as the primary liaison with the family of the deceased.
 - The Communications Director for Student Life will act as the primary coordinator for campus communications.
- We will respect a family's wishes with regard to stating the cause of death, but the Office of the Vice President and Dean of Students will proceed with campus notification that a death has occurred and the timing of when campus notification occurs.

What to Communicate:

Because circumstances will vary, our communication following a death will be tailored to each situation. Every reasonable attempt will be made to address privacy concerns of the family. We will primarily consider family preference when planning extent of distribution. At times it may be more appropriate to focus communications to a specific community or cohort. Potential elements of communication include:

- Acknowledgement of the loss of a community member
- Condolences to friends, family, and loved ones
- Circumstances of death with brief details (respecting privacy as appropriate)
- Brief biography (activities, awards, organizations, etc., if known)
- Information about grief gatherings (or memorial services, if known)
- Information about institutional resources

Communication Process for a Student Death:

1. Upon receiving confirmation that a death has occurred, the Vice President/Dean of Students contacts parents or family of the deceased, serving as institutional liaison.
2. The Vice President/Dean of Students notifies the President.
3. The Vice President/Dean of Students contacts the Student Life communications director who will notify the Associate Vice President for Research, Academics, Campus and Culture Communications and the Director of Institute Campus Communications and Events and takes the lead on drafting campus-wide communications.

- a. The Student Life communications director takes the lead in coordinating with the school/unit communicator to provide assistance and facilitate information exchange. In the absence of a dedicated communications professional at the school level, the communications manager will coordinate with the college's communications director. Institute Communications provides secondary assistance as needed.

4. The Vice President/Dean of Students sends its Student Death Notification to appropriate administrative personnel. This is the official notification. In addition to the deceased's college dean and school chair, this notification includes:
 - President's Office (multiple)
 - Provost's Office (multiple)
 - Registrar's Office (multiple)
 - Bursar's Office
 - Stamps Health Services
 - Tech Police Department
 - Parent & Family Programs
 - Alumni Association
 - SGA leadership
 - Financial Aid
 - Tech Post Office
 - Parking and Transportation
 - Housing
 - Counseling Center
 - Student media
 - Student's faculty instructors
 - Dean of the College
 - Campus Chaplains
 - Institute Communications
 - Student Life Communications Director

5. Vice President/Dean of Students contacts the faculty of the student and mobilizes Counseling Center staff support the community when appropriate.

6. Vice President/Dean of Students (with assistance of the SL communications director) sends an email message announcing the death of the student to the entire campus: students, staff, and faculty. (When possible, within 24 hours of official notification).
 - a. The extent of this message distribution (campus-wide vs a specific community or cohort) of this message will be decided in advance with support from Institute Communications.
 - b. The Student Life communications director will work with Institute Communications media relations team to craft a media statement and Q&A for media.

7. With the assistance of the Student Life communications director, the unit communicator drafts a message to the college/school/program. The unit and/or college may add the announcement to a departmental website at

their discretion.

- a. This message will be distributed after the campus-wide notification is sent unless a campus-wide notification is deemed unnecessary.
8. The campus notification will be sent to the Parent & Family Programs listserve by the Student Life communications director.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What if the family does not want any kind of public announcement of death?

While respect for the student, the student's family, and friends should be upheld when appropriate, it is also important to consider the well-being of the campus community as a whole. The death must be acknowledged in some form; not for prurient interest but to honor a life, grieve as a community, and remind us all of the help and resources that are readily available.

What if the deceased was part of OMSCS, or some future accredited online degree program?

While these students are fully considered to be Georgia Tech students, their interactions with and participation in campus life are restricted, and their academic interactions are limited to their cohort. Given this, it is recommended that notification be limited to those within the student's online cohort, as well as the faculty and graduate students who facilitate the education process. We recommend the same procedure for students who matriculate on international campuses.

What if the death occurs during a critical juncture, such as the week of final exams?

We will proceed with the standard protocol. Other messaging, such as an acknowledgement of the heightened period of stress and reinforcement of need for self-care, may also be appropriate under these circumstances. An awareness of the special programming that CARE or the Counseling Center and other departments offer during final exams may also help direct the community to specific resources and opportunities.

What if my dean/school chair/leadership is unavailable?

It is recommended that a unit communicator have a conversation with his or her academic leader to learn their preferences for next-in-line communications. Alternately, a unit communicator is encouraged to work with the academic leader to develop an approved message template beforehand to mitigate this risk.

SAMPLE MESSAGING

Message to the Campus Community from the Vice President/Dean of Students

Students, staff, and faculty of Georgia Tech,

The sudden and tragic death of an undergraduate student on (date) has been devastating news to the Georgia Tech community, and in particular to all who knew (him/her). For members of the _____ housing community and for faculty who had the student enrolled in their classes, the shock and grief are particularly acute. Counselors from the Georgia Tech Counseling Center have been at the residence hall working with students, RAs, and residence hall staff.

We are committed to providing resources for the mental, emotional, and physical well being of our entire campus community. Please remember that Georgia Tech offers multiple services and resources in support of the community during this time of loss and grief:

(RESOURCES)

It is our hope that anyone who needs these services will be able to take full advantage of them. At times like these, we are reminded of the importance of coming together in support, understanding, and care for one another.

Message to College/School from Dean/Chair (Example)

To members of the _____ Community,

As you may have heard by now, this weekend we suffered a tragic loss with the death of one of our students, _____ (student's name)

News like this can be devastating to a close-knit community such as ours. Anytime someone, particularly a young person, passes away suddenly and tragically, there are a range of emotions to be addressed and questions to be answered. All of that will happen in the coming days. For now I simply wanted to make all of you aware of this tragedy and assure you that Georgia Tech is responding at the very highest levels.

We will have trained counselors from the Georgia Tech Counseling Center available (Insert information on availability, location, hours if they have been requested through the Vice President of Student Life and Dean of Students). Also, please see the additional resources below as shared today by John Stein, Office of the Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students.

This is a sad day for the _____ (College/Unit). Let us find strength in each other. If you find yourself having difficulty coping, I urge you to take advantage of the help that is available. The Institute and the College will make available additional information as appropriate. In the meantime let us join together to mourn one of our own, and to support each other through this difficult time.
(Resource Links)

Resource List for Mental Health & Well-being Support

- Center for Assessment, Referral and Education (CARE), care.gatech.edu, on the first floor of the Smithgall Student Services (Flag) building from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. throughout the week and after-hours by calling 404-894-2575
- Georgia Tech Counseling Center (www.counseling.gatech.edu) is staffed by psychologists and mental health counselors. They offer brief,

confidential counseling and crisis intervention services to students. The Counseling Center also offers an after hours on-call counselor to speak and consult with students in crisis. In addition, they sponsor a series of workshops for managing stress.

- Stamps Health Services (<http://health.gatech.edu/services/Pages/Psychiatry.aspx>) is open to students and their spouses. Students interested in scheduling an appointment may call 404-894-2585 or visit the second floor of the Stamps Health Services Building.
- Division of Student Life and the Office of the Vice President and Dean of Students has a referral option if you are concerned about a student (www.studentlife.gatech.edu).
- The Georgia Crisis & Access Line (1-800-715-4225) is staffed with professional social workers and counselors 24 hours per day, every day, to assist those with urgent and emergency needs. www.mygcal.com.
- Staff and faculty may find support through the Employee Assistance Program at hwb.gatech.edu/eap.