



**Georgia Institute of Technology
Student Death Notification
Revised: April 2024**

Public Health Guiding Framework

Mental health research has clearly documented the harm that results from suicide contagion. People are 10 times more likely to commit suicide if they know somebody who did. In addition, a history of depression or mental health disorders, the death or loss of somebody they know, or exposure to the suicidal behavior of others (such as friends/peers/celebrities) can also increase the risk of suicide. This doesn't even begin to address the wide range of traumatic and triggering experiences and events that students also undergo - amplified by the readily available info on social media. As a result, we want to be responsible about balancing that some people have a "need to know" regarding any student death with a public health value that we not engage in behaviors which actually contribute to negative impacts on student health and well-being.

We are still engaging in notification about a student death, but we are engaging in a concentric circle communication approach, starting with the peers who are closest to the student, and then expanding outwards. We intend to evaluate each student death on a case-by-case basis and determine who would most need to know so that they are informed in a timely manner, and we can alert them to available resources for help.

We encourage faculty and staff who receive the original round of notification to then forward that notification and add their own personal note or communication when they do so – promoting a greater ethic of care and compassion that cannot be achieved with just one mass email. For example, on the last student death, the department chair took the email I sent and forwarded it to students in the department with her own note included at the top.

- Research and resources that support this direction:
 - [The Contagion of Suicidal Behavior - NCBI Bookshelf](#),
 - [Association between exposure to suicide and suicidality outcomes in youth | CMAJ](#),
 - [Responsible reporting to prevent suicide contagion \(cmaj.ca\)](#), and
 - [Responsible Reporting of Suicide | National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#).

When the death involves a student, the dean of students will act as the primary liaison with the family of the deceased and the vice president for Student Engagement & Well-Being will be the author and signatory of any campus communications. The senior director for communications and marketing for Student Engagement & Well-Being 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 we will proceed with campus notification that a death has occurred and the timing of when campus notification occurs based on an assessment of the impacted audiences.

Communication Protocol

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. Reasonable efforts will be made to minimize traumatizing or triggering recipients and to avoid suicide contagion. 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) being planned by family and friends
- Information about institutional resources

Communication Process for a Student Death

1. Upon receiving confirmation that a death has occurred, dean of students contacts parents or family of the deceased, serving as institutional liaison.
2. The dean of students notifies the president, the vice president for Student Engagement & Well-Being (SEWB) and the senior director for communications and marketing for SEWB.
3. A team within Student Engagement & Well-Being will decide what departments and organizations – inclusive of students, staff, and faculty - need to be notified of the student death.
4. The 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 & Residence Life
 - Center for Mental Health Care & Resources
 - Student Media
 - Dean(s) of the College
 - Academic Department Chair(s)
 - Institute Chaplains
 - Institute Communications
 - SEWB Senior Director for Communications & Marketing
5. The dean of students contacts the faculty of the student and mobilizes the Center for Mental Health Care & Resources staff to support when appropriate.
6. Postvention sessions should be offered and implemented as needed for academic departments, administrative units and/or residential living units as soon as possible after the student’s death.
7. The vice president for SEWB notifies their central administration and leadership teams of the student death and forthcoming message distribution with planned communications channels highlighted. The vice president also alerts members of the president’s cabinet, deans and other senior administrators as relevant. Other SEWB stakeholders may be

notified as warranted.

8. The senior director for communications and marketing for SEWB will notify Institute Communications and the following partners to provide assistance and facilitate information exchange to relevant audiences:
 - a. The unit communicator at the college or school level;
 - b. Housing and Residence Life StarRes notifications team (when student was a campus resident);
 - c. Student Organizations (for which the student was a member of); and/or
 - d. Any other point of contact for a relevant communication channel regarding the student death.
9. The vice president for SEWB (with assistance of the senior director for communications and marketing) sends a targeted communication to impacted groups (when possible, within 24-48 hours of official notification, recognizing that unique or unforeseen circumstances may cause delay).
 - a. The senior director for communications and marketing for SEWB works with IC media relations team to craft a media statement and Q&A for media if necessary.
 - b. The vice president's communication should be further forwarded by additional points of contact, with their own message included at the top, to ensure concentric circles of communication are fully engaged. The communication will note this request.
10. With the assistance of the senior director for communications and marketing for SEWB, the unit communicator drafts a message to the college/school/program by the dean or chair of the program.

Resource List for Mental Health & Well-being Support – Template Language

- Georgia Tech offers multiple support services and resources for students; I encourage you to take advantage of them as needed (<https://students.gatech.edu/student-resource-guide>).
- Grief counseling and mental health support for students is available through the Center for Mental Health Care & Resources (<https://mentalhealth.gatech.edu/>). There are extended office hours offered until 7 PM on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but if you need immediate support, you can reach a counselor by calling 404-894-2575 and selecting option 1 to speak with the after-hours counselor.
- Staff and faculty may find support through the Employee Assistance Program at <https://benefits.hr.gatech.edu/employee-assistance-program/>.
- The Dean of Students Office has a referral option if you are concerned about a student (<https://referral.studentlife.gatech.edu/>). After hours assistance with the Dean on Call is also available by calling GTPD at 404-894-2500 and asking for the "Dean on Call to be contacted.
- If you need immediate assistance, you can also contact the [Georgia Crisis & Access Line](#) at 1-800-715-4225.

- Institute chaplains are available to support students, and Registered Student Organization (RSO) with a spiritual or faith-based mission may be a good resource for grief support: <https://diversityprograms.gatech.edu/content/spirituality>
- Through a partnership with [Uwill](#), sponsored by the University System of Georgia (USG), students can access 24/7/365 assistance by calling 404-894-2575 to get in-the-moment support from a counselor. Students can also visit the [GT Wellness Hub website](#) for more self-care resources.
- [Wellness coaching](#) is another resource for students who are experiencing stress. Wellness coaches empower students to take the necessary steps to make a desired change in behavior. To learn more or register for this program, visit the [Wellness Empowerment Center webpage](#).

Conducting Memorial Services for Students

Georgia Tech does not initiate or take on the responsibility to plan memorial or funeral services for any individual student. For purposes of parity, we recognize all members of the Georgia Tech community, including students, who have passed away during the previous academic year at the annual *When the Whistle Blows* event in April.

If faculty, family, or friends of a student who has passed away would like to plan/sponsor an event, professional staff in the Dean of Students Office may be available to help connect the planners with appropriate campus resources, e.g., reserving a facility, catering services, etc.

Georgia Tech will not co-sponsor or co-host memorial or funeral services for individual students, faculty, or staff.

Updated April 4, 2024

Copies of this protocol are maintained by the Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement & Well-being, email vp_sewb@gatech.edu.