

# STUDENT AFFAIRS LEADER

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## Campus Response to a Student Death

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One of the more unpleasant tasks facing student affairs divisions is responding to a campus death or tragedy. Cintron, Weathers, and Garlough (2007) suggest that university administrators, faculty, and students do not anticipate facing death on campus, although Iserson and Bollet (1999) have estimated that between 6,000 and 22,000 students die every year on campuses.

Responding to a student death involves a variety of tasks including providing compassion to those grieving, supporting administrative efforts to contact families and community, and facilitating the remembrance of those who have died. Grief and emotions following a death fall within a wide range. Any response to a student death on campus should start with the assumption that everyone has his or her own grieving process. Some students want to talk. Others want to avoid contact. Some avoid class and work. Others find the distractions helpful. As a result, universities' responses need to be flexible.

In times of crisis, offices may isolate themselves, limit communication with other offices, and develop separate reactions based on the expertise of their areas (for instance, counseling services

offering a support group, the dean's office drafting a campuswide email, the public relations office addressing the press, and resident assistants holding floor meetings). However, it is also important to have a coordinated response among student affairs, academic affairs, and various other departments that become involved. The motto "We can accomplish more working together than working alone" should be the central theme when responding to loss and grieving. Not only does this approach gather needed resources (such as fiscal budgets and staff/faculty time), it also allows for community members to become involved in the process of response, which is an important part of the grieving process.

### Special considerations for suicide

Suicide continues to be a taboo subject in American society; even mainstream media is reluctant to report on suicides beyond releasing the names of the dead. A death by suicide may be the hardest death to experience. There is often unnecessary guilt and shame surrounding suicide. This further complicates the grieving process.

Students are left with unanswered questions and strong emotions, such as regret ("If I had only..."), sadness, and anger. It is highly encouraged to refer these students to counseling services to assist them with processing the complicated feelings they are experiencing. It is often difficult, even for the experienced

clinician, to help the student navigate the overwhelming onslaught of emotions the student is encountering.

### Working with faculty and staff

Faculty and staff should acknowledge the death, rather than ignoring it or pushing students quickly through their experiences, to set the example that it is okay to talk about the person and situation.

Classroom faculty and staff have a close relationship with their students and are in danger of being overlooked when university responses become focused on students. Therefore, it's important to allow faculty to grieve as well. This helps them have the energy to assist students and models the concept that a student death impacts everyone, not just the students. Human resources can often be helpful in this process. It may be helpful to contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to see if they have counseling staff to assist faculty.

### Practical suggestions for a campus response

1) Think proactively. Hold an annual candlelight or remembrance vigil for all who have died during the year. Develop this collaboratively through several departments, including the student affairs dean's office, counseling, health services, and residential life. Create

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## Campaign Will Approach Campus Violence as a Whole-Society Problem

A new “Enough is Enough” violence-prevention collaboration will approach campus violence as a whole-society, not just a postsecondary, problem.

The campaign takes its title from a closing speech delivered during NASPA’s 2008 annual conference by Zenobia Hikes, vice president of student affairs at Virginia Tech. During the speech, Hikes said, “I don’t know about you, but I’m tired of the incessant violence ... If you are tired, and I believe you are, say, ‘Enough is enough.’”

To solve the campus safety problem, she said, “We must look at our society, a society that has shaped this violent rage from preadolescence ... Universities are a microcosm of larger society, and whatever is in society ends up on our campuses.”

During the keynote, Hikes also described the experience of responding to the April 2007 shootings on her campus and the support she and the institution received from the student affairs community afterward.

The Enough Is Enough campaign will include secondary and postsecondary administrators and educators as well as parents and students. Campaign goals include proposing research questions for further study and producing best practices for addressing disturbed and disturbing students.

Suggestions and ideas can be emailed to [enough@naspa.org](mailto:enough@naspa.org) with “Enough Is Enough” in the subject line. More information on the campaign, including a video of Hikes’ speech, is available at <http://www.naspa.org/enough/index.cfm>. ●

### *PERSPECTIVES from page 6*

energy to employ an outside evaluation/consultation team to review the current operation and make suggestions for improvements. Representatives from other institutions can provide great insight into your operations as they look at it through fresh eyes.

#### **9) Develop a food service strategic plan.**

Prioritize the issues you have uncovered through your consultation with students, faculty, staff, administrative colleagues, and outside consultants. Attach costs to each issue and develop a timeline for implementation of changes in operations and facilities.

#### **10) Include food service in your management team.**

The director of food service should be included in the meetings of any management group for the division. All food

service staff should be encouraged to attend staff development and social programs within the division of student affairs. It is helpful for food service management personnel to understand the issues facing both the institution and the division of student affairs, and it is helpful for other deans and directors to hear about their concerns.

Finally, remember that although you might choose to contract out all or some of the food service options provided on campus, you are still responsible for providing a quality food service operation with options that meet the needs of today’s students.

*C. Arthur Sandeen, Ph.D., and Margaret J. Barr, Ph.D., together have more than 45 years’ experience as vice presidents of student affairs. They are both contributing editors for Student Affairs Leader. Send your questions for them to [tkattner@magnapubs.com](mailto:tkattner@magnapubs.com). ●*

**Update of model alcohol prevention programs:** The U.S. Department of Education has updated a 40-page report describing model alcohol and drug abuse prevention programs on 30 college and university campuses. The report is available at [www.higheredcenter.org/files/product/model.pdf](http://www.higheredcenter.org/files/product/model.pdf) and in alternate formats such as Braille, large print, or audiotape by calling 202-260-0852.

**SAMHSA campus suicide prevention grants:** The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is accepting applications for grants supporting college campus suicide prevention. Applications are due by November 25. Application information is available at [www.samhsa.gov/Grants/2009/sm\\_09\\_001.pdf](http://www.samhsa.gov/Grants/2009/sm_09_001.pdf).

**Bike-sharing programs:** More campuses are creating bicycle-sharing programs, not only to help the environment but also so that students don't have to deal with the hassles of finding parking or having their own bikes stolen. Information about Emory University's and Duke University's bike-sharing programs is available at <http://bike.emory.edu> and <http://parking.duke.edu/bikes>.

**De-tagging Facebook photos:** *The New York Times'* July 27 Education Life section contains an interesting article about a new Sunday ritual among traditional-age college students: visiting Facebook to de-tag or remove their names from embarrassing photos taken Saturday night. The article "Picture Your Name Here" reviews several other ways college students protect their reputations on social networking sites. It includes an illustration that's instructive to administrators and students alike, showing how tagging and de-tagging work.

**Hall fire sentencing:** Seven years after three Seton Hall University students died in a residence hall fire, the students who deliberately set the blaze were sentenced in court. Earlier this year, two former students received five-year prison terms, with an opportunity for parole within 16 months.

Many students escaped from the January 2000 fire, but three died and several were badly burned. The sentencing came after nearly three years of investigation, which led to the arrests, and then three more years of pre-trial activity. This year, just before their criminal trial started, the pair of defendants agreed to plead guilty to lesser charges of arson and witness tampering to reduce their possible sanctions. If the case had been tried, they could have faced the consequences of a murder indictment.

The defendants said the fire was simply a "prank that got out of hand," but family members of the victims expressed disappointment at the plea deal and possibly short jail term. The fire did raise national college and university concerns about safety and risks on campus and led to fire alarm detection system legislation around the country.

**Response to RIAA notices:** The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) says that last year it sent the University of South Carolina 914 copyright violation notices—one of the highest totals sent that year to a U.S. college or university—for alleged illegal file downloading by students.

USC says it is committed to compliance with the law. Under the federal Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, colleges and universities can reduce or be exempt from violation liability if they help identify violators and remove illegally obtained materials.

USC says it is looking to expand notices to students about illegal file sharing, placing stricter limits on sharing

files, and is considering contracting with a legal file-sharing company. USC also notes that it employs a full-time staff person to respond to the downloading problem and it works with student violators. USC students not complying with the law face sanctions, including removal of materials, loss of internet privileges, and possible community service.

**University halts beer deliveries:** Miami University in Ohio has put a halt to beer deliveries to its residence halls. Previously, hall residents over the age of 21 were permitted to have vendors deliver beer to their rooms.

Although the move affects only a small number of students, it is part of a 41-part plan to address alcohol abuse on campus. Miami is also adding more Friday morning classes to limit Thursday night drinking and has established a campus Alcoholics Anonymous chapter.

**Student union considers litigation:** The Black Student Union at Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis (IUPUI) says it might consider court action if the university fails to respond positively to their demands for a new black culture center, more black faculty members, and funding for black student organizations.

The organization also asks for sensitivity training for administrators and a new degree program in African-American studies. The Black Student Union also says it was not consulted before a building named for a local NAACP leader was torn down to create more parking. ●

*STUDENT DEATH from page 1*

handouts and Web resources for faculty and staff to offer guidance on how to respond to students experiencing a death.

2) If appropriate, involve the campus chaplain or other religious figures to help in the planning of the response. Ensure that the service is both nondenominational and meaningful at the same time. Campus chaplains can be excellent resources for creating sacred space and services and can generally accommodate differing belief systems.

3) Encourage the deceased's friends to plan and hold a memorial service. This allows them to begin the healing process and provides some direction to their grief. Encourage faculty, staff, and counseling services staff to attend the event. Remember to use online resources such as Facebook and MySpace to increase awareness, let community members know about the event, and provide students (and grieving parents) a place to contribute and remember the lost student. It is important to ask the families of those who have died if they want a part in planning the service or if they want a service at all.

4) The university should make a public notification early to direct those looking for information or direction (i.e., flowers and a guest book somewhere conspicuous, ribbons). This signals to the community that something has happened and steers them toward a communal response.

5) Counseling and residential life staff should reach out to those at greatest risk. Promote grief awareness with periodic ads, articles, and presentations on the inevitable and normal experience of grief. Counseling should offer a support group and provide consultation to residential life to help them assist with grieving students.

6) Communicate early with staff and faculty. If the death occurred suddenly, use the university computer system or registrar to find out what classes the student was in. Consider having counseling make phone calls to professors to inform them of what happened. Allow the faculty to request that counseling come into their classrooms. Don't require this, but allow individual faculty and departments to make this choice.

7) Identify one central place on campus for information, updates, brief counseling, and memorializing the death, so people know "where to go" during this time of grief. Identify staff who will do an impact assessment (i.e., determine who has been affected by the death, such as roommates, student organization members, coworkers, students from the same hometown, etc.).

8) Be aware of cumulative stress. If the magnitude of the student loss is high (as it was at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University) or multiple deaths have occurred, these events may tax

community members beyond what they can cope with. Consider reaching out to other colleges and universities for support and extra help.

9) In some situations, a campus may find an external trauma response team to be valuable. These are usually available through local mental health agencies or the Red Cross. They may be called critical incident stress debriefing (CISD) or critical incident stress management (CISM) teams. They are often free of charge and available on a 24/7 basis. Be aware that your campus may need to do some planning to help the team work within your institution's language, structure, and hierarchy.

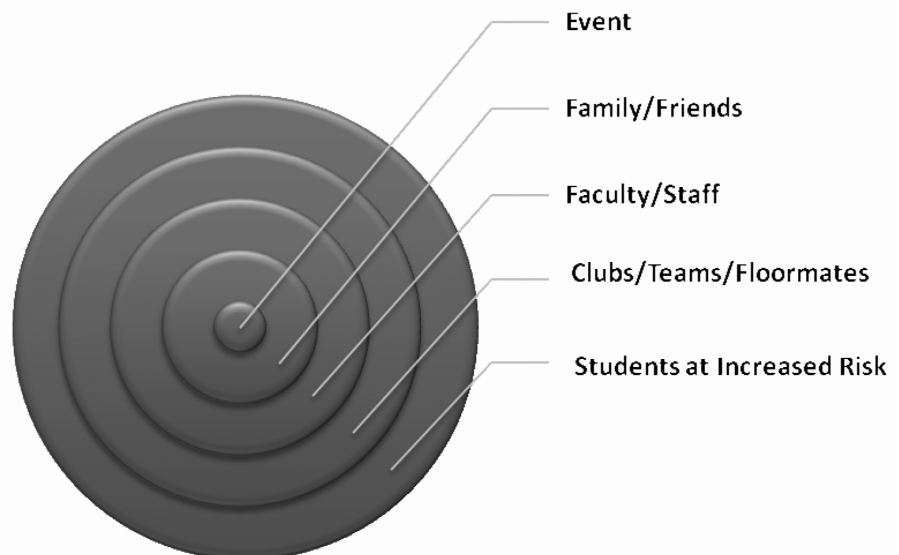
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Cintron, R., Weathers, E. & Garlough, K. (2007). *College Student Death: Guidance for a Caring Campus*. University Press of America.

Iserson, K. & Bollet, A.J. (1999) *Grave Words: Notifying Survivors about Sudden, Unexpected Deaths*. Gallen Press

### Notification and Outreach Suggestions

This graphic offers suggestions for who a university should notify and reach out to after a student death based on their proximity to the deceased and the magnitude of impact the event could have on them.



## Review: What's Race Got to Do with It?

Gwendolyn Dungy

Recently, I had the opportunity to make a much-anticipated speech to a convention of sorority students, alumni, and staff. I was anxious about speaking to them because I know how difficult it is to listen to a speaker after dinner and how exciting it is for young women to be together all dressed up with so much to share. Through some huge blessing or magic wand, I seemed to connect with them and they showed their appreciation after the speech, wanting photos and to talk further about something that resonated with them.

As I was surrounded by excited young women and everyone was talking, someone came barging through the crowd. She handed me a yellow ticket that was one of three kinds of tickets that had been at our place setting: green for vegetarian, red for beef, and yellow for chicken. The young woman was rather breathless when she thrust the ticket at me and said, “I thought you would want this; I found it on the floor right over there, that’s where I found it.” I took the ticket, puzzled, but still caught up in the euphoria of the reception I had received. I thought no more about it and continued my conversations with the rest of the folks who were standing there. The next morning – with a clearer head – I realized why the young woman gave me the yellow chicken ticket.

Even though I had the requisite credentials that greatly garner respect and had been well received by most at the dinner, there was at least a coterie of these young college women who saw my race as something that made them feel they could remind me that I was black and therefore invited ridicule.

College-educated students are our future leaders; they are role models. They will live in a world of racial and ethnic diversity and should be held to a higher standard. It was important that this incident serve as a teachable moment: if students had the nerve to do this to me

publicly, one wonders what they are doing to their peers when there are no witnesses.

Regardless of whether they are the “minority” or not, students in today’s post-Civil Rights world generally do not want to have conversations or participate in exercises about diversity or intercultural communications. They feel they’ve heard it all before or wonder why we’re still talking about a problem that ended a long time ago. But people don’t always get what they want, and clearly these problems did not end a long time ago. We need to call students, colleagues, and ourselves on any behavior that appears to be based on preconceived negative ideas about a group of people. If we take risks anywhere, it is in speaking against injustice and prejudice wherever and whenever we see it.

*What's Race Got to Do with It?* is a 49-minute documentary film that considers the social disparities that exist in higher education and their impact on student success. It chronicles the journey of a diverse group of students participating in a 15-week intergroup dialogue program at the University of California, Berkeley. As the students share personal stories, debate hot topics, and confront one another about the role race plays in their lives, they make discoveries about their preconceived ideas and assumptions, and in so doing help us begin to untangle our own preconceived notions. The film serves to get the “high stakes” topics on the table in a manner accessible to both individuals who have never thought much about race and longtime activists.

Too few resources exist to help young people – using language they understand spoken by their peers – scrutinize their own assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes about race. Serving as an up-to-date tool speaking directly to students’ doubts and concerns, this film focuses not only on what’s being said, but also on what’s not being discussed openly – the underlying fears, frustration, ignorance, and confusion that render unproductive so

many of our conversations about racism. The film reveals just how different our experiences and perceptions can be of the world we ostensibly share.

Student affairs leaders will find the film useful in several ways:

- Increasing awareness about disparities that impact student retention and success
- Building support for programs and practices that increase social equity
- Fostering active learning, critical thinking, and inclusive assignments, texts, and pedagogic models
- Reviewing and strengthening diversity commitments, objectives, budget allocations, goals, and measurements
- Examining policies that affect under-represented groups
- Encouraging diversity in “unlikely” places and at multiple levels
- Creating a more inclusive institutional climate

*What's Race Got to Do with It?* does not attempt to replicate the experience of the class, nor does it supply easy answers. What it does provide is a starting point for a deeper, more productive level of conversation – one grounded in real-life issues and experiences. Perhaps most important, the film challenges each of us to reflect on existing disparities and the responsibility we all share – individually and institutionally – to create more equitable conditions for everyone.

*Gwendolyn Dungy is the executive director of NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Information on What's Race Got to Do with It? is available at [www.whatsrace.org](http://www.whatsrace.org).* ●

## Supervising Food Service

**Q.** *Recently the responsibility for food service has been transferred from business affairs to student affairs. Students have been complaining about the quality of the food and the options for some time – up to now the business office has said that change is too expensive. What should be my first steps as student affairs begins to supervise food service?*

**A.** *C. Arthur Sandeen and Margaret J. Barr respond:*

For years higher education professionals have said that the top three complaints on their campuses have been parking, food service, and health service. We don't know whether or not that is true, but the quality of the food service is one of the ways that students perceive that a college or university cares about them and what they like. College students of this generation have grown up in a society where they can get a wide variety of food 24 hours a day, and they bring that expectation with them to college. And in these tough economic times, providing quality food service options at the lowest possible cost for students is a challenge on any college campus. Finally, it is rare that a completely healthy unit is transferred to another administrative unit, so you are probably inheriting an operation that has some problems. That being said, here are some ideas as you begin your new responsibilities:

### 1) Review the standards.

It does not matter whether the food service is self-operated, a contract service, or a combination of some contracted services and a self-operated residential program.

Whatever the situation, you need to determine what the institution has been asking the food service to do. Are those reasonable expectations? Should they be modified in some ways, and if so, how should they be changed? If it is a contract food service, who is responsible for supervising the contract and when is the contract up for review?

Understanding what the standards

have been for operation of the food service will provide a first step in determining what steps need to be taken to integrate the food service into the division of student affairs and improve the service to the collegiate community.

### 2) Talk to the food service management.

The director of dining services, the executive chefs, and the dining hall supervisors all have ideas about what should be done to improve the food service operation. Find out what those ideas are and ask them to provide cost estimates for the implementation of any changes. What are the greatest challenges faced by the food service staff and what are their greatest joys?

### 3) Work with or form a food service committee.

Find out if there is a student-run food service committee that provides advice and student input to the food service operation. If there is a committee, meet with them as soon as possible. If no committee exists, work with the appropriate student government bodies to form a viable group. Student input is essential to good food service operations.

### 4) Seek advice from others in the institution.

Your colleagues in academic, administrative, and business affairs will all have helpful suggestions on how to improve the food service. Consult with them and provide mechanisms for them to provide input and ideas on a regular basis.

### 5) Review the budget.

Simultaneously, you should be reviewing the food service budget. What

are the operating costs for each unit? What are the controllable costs? What are the uncontrollable costs? Discuss the budget with the food service management to find out what challenges the budget provides for them. Explore the status of the current equipment repair and replacement as well as facility renovation reserves to see how they are funded and if any changes need to be made.

### 6) Eat regularly in as many food service locations as you can.

Experience the food service as a student does (although we must admit that it's hard for any of us to be incognito in a college dining room). See what is working well and what needs to be improved from the student user's vantage point. Encourage other staff members throughout the student affairs division to eat in the food service locations and provide helpful feedback on both successes and opportunities for improvement.

### 7) Think creatively.

If you have had only an in-house operation for food service, examine contracted services for part of the operation. Students are brand conscious, so adding a Starbucks, Quiznos, or Wendy's may go a long way in providing options that they will enjoy and patronize. Or if has been a contracted service, ask the vendor to expand the options provided for students and ask them to rebid the contract with more options.

### 8) Consider an outside evaluation/consultation team.

It may be wise to invest the time and

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