



Death of a Current Student Communication Policy & Protocol

Category: General

Jurisdiction: Provost Vice-President, Academic

Approval Authority: Executive Team

Established on: November 26, 2024

Amendments: N/A

Most Recent Review: N/A

1. Purpose and Scope

It is a great loss when a student from our Lakehead University community passes away.

This policy aims to foster a compassionate, supportive and coordinated response to communication while maintaining respect and sensitivity towards the deceased student, their family and other members of our university community who may have been impacted.

When a member of the Lakehead University community becomes aware of the death of a current student, the Office of Student Affairs should be notified to initiate communications surrounding the student's death.

Note: In the event of an immediate emergency entailing a student, refer to Lakehead University's Emergency/Crisis Response Policy.

2. Definitions

“Current Student” A student who is currently enrolled, whether full-time or part-time, in special, access, undergraduate, graduate, or professional studies.

3. Guiding Principles

In the event of the loss of a Lakehead student, the University's response is guided by the following:

a) Respect, Sensitivity and Compassion

Lakehead University will act and respond in a highly sensitive manner out of respect for the deceased student and in accordance with the wishes of the family or next of kin.

The family or next of kin's wishes will play a significant role in the response of the University.

b) Privacy

Lakehead University respects the privacy and confidentiality of the deceased student and their family. Information about the death of a student must be verified prior to any release or action taken by the University. The University will not release the name or status of the deceased student without the explicit consent of the family, nor will it release the cause of death. Any communications related to the student's death will be done with the utmost sensitivity and respect. Notifications of the student's death will be shared with university departments that need the information to enable administrative actions to be undertaken. Use, access and disclosure of personal information shall be in accordance with the Ontario *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

c) Cooperation

The University will coordinate communications with the family or next of kin. University Departments will work together to obtain administrative closure in a timely and efficient manner, including where necessary with external bodies.

d) Timeliness

The University will respond as quickly as possible, recognizing in some cases there may be justified delays. To minimize the amount of distress to the family or next-of-kin, efforts will be made to minimize the number of interactions and to obtain administrative closure in a timely and efficient manner.

e) Support

Grief support is an important part of the healing process after a loss. People experience grief in many ways and the feelings, thoughts and reactions are very personal to the individual. The University aims to provide information about grief support options available to students, staff, and faculty. Considerations to accommodate affected students will also be provided in consultation with the appropriate departments.

4. Guidelines

The Office of Student Affairs should be notified about the death of a student by contacting the Vice-Provost Students & Registrar. If notification of the death is provided from a source other than the deceased person's family, the Office of Student Affairs will compile and review the information to confirm death prior to initiating a University response. The Office of Student Affairs will work with other areas of the university, where appropriate, to carry this out.

The Office of Student Affairs will ensure that the deceased student's academic records, accounts and any other dealings with the University are managed and closed in a way that reflects the values outlined in this Policy.

The Faculty/Academic Department or Department with the strongest connection to the student will collaborate with the Office of Student Affairs, Human Resources and the communications department to coordinate communication within the Lakehead community. The University's [In Memoriam Policy](#) will be enacted to guide how University communications are handled.

In cases where the student was close to completing their program, the University may consider posthumous degree conferral and will consult with the Vice-Provost Students & Registrar.

Review Period: 5 years;

Next Review Period: 2029-2030;

Related Policies and Procedures: Emergency/Crisis Response Policy; In Memoriam Policy

Policy Superseded by this Policy: None.

The University Secretariat manages the development of policies through an impartial, fair governance process, and in accordance with the Policy Governance Framework. Please contact the University Secretariat for additional information on University policies and procedures and/or if you require this information in another format.

Office of the University Secretariat

Hours: Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm;

Location: University Centre, Thunder Bay Campus, Room UC2002

Phone: 807-343-8010 ext. 8184

Email: admin.unse@lakeheadu.ca

Procedures: Death of a Current Student Communication Policy & Protocol

Category: General

Established on: November 26, 2024

Amendments: N/A

Most Recent Review: N/A

Procedures

The response to a student's death shall be conducted in accordance with the following set of Procedures for the Death of a Current Student.

1. Notification of Death

When a University community member becomes aware of the death of a current student they shall inform the Office of Student Affairs.

The Office of Student Affairs is responsible for coordinating the University's response to the death of a current student. This includes collecting and verifying information about the death, including confirmation that it is a Lakehead student, prior to any action taken by the University.

2. Formation of a Response Team

A Response Team will be formed to organize, lead and provide advice and support on the University's response to the student's death.

The composition of the Response Team will be established based on the nature of the death, student-type, and the student's affiliation to the University. The Response Team will include:

- Vice-Provost Students & Registrar
- Associate Vice-President Communications & Marketing*
- Chief of Staff*
- Manager of Student Conduct & Case Management*

- Director of Security*

*or designate

Additional members may also be invited to participate in the Response Team:

Vice Provost International, Vice Provost Indigenous Initiatives, Associate Vice-President Administration (Orillia), Director of Athletics, Director of Residence, or others as deemed necessary.

Duties of the Response Team

The Response Team will:

Communication with Family

- Identify an individual who will be the University's primary contact for the family or next-of-kin going forward on any communications or administrative issues. This individual will serve as a conduit between the university community and the primary contact for the family. Facilitate extensions of condolences, including attendance at a gathering in honour of the student, if possible and appropriate.
- Determine the appropriate manner for communicating with the student's immediate family or next-of-kin;
- Determine any arrangements that may be appropriate or meaningful to the family or next-of-kin;
- Student groups, friends and/or the Faculty/Department of the deceased student may wish to organize their own activity that celebrates the life, contributions, and memories of the deceased student. Any such activities, although not regarded as a memorial service, should be coordinated with the university representative assigned to coordinate Lakehead University's response. Family members or next-of-kin will be informed of activities such as these and may be invited to attend these events, but the University is not in a position to contribute towards costs associated with these events.

Communication with Lakehead Community

- Facilitate the communication of available grief and support services for students, faculty, and staff (e.g. counselling, academic supports, external supports, EAP reminders). In exceptional circumstances, work with University departments to arrange external resources as required.
- As appropriate, liaise with the family or next-of-kin and the Office of the President regarding any arrangements for the flag to be flown at half-mast in accordance with the University's [In Memoriam Policy](#).
- Where applicable, liaise with the appropriate Faculty to provide a recommendation to the Vice-Provost Students & Registrar regarding the awarding of a posthumous degree;
- Ensure that necessary University units are notified with current and accurate information and that the information being used or disclosed is in accordance with the University's [Freedom of Information and Protection of Individual Privacy](#) and procedures.
 - Notification to departments, at minimum, should include Student Awards and Financial Aid for government student aid matters and the Lakehead University Student Union regarding student insurance concerns.
- Provide advice and support to University units with regard to the performance of their administrative responsibilities around a student death and confirm follow-up actions have been completed.
- Collect documentation on the administrative response to the student's death to retain in the Office of Student Affairs for records management purposes.
- Enact the [In Memoriam Policy](#) to facilitate broad communication about the student's death in accordance with the deceased person's family or next of kin's wishes.

Communication Externally

- Through the AVP Communications & Marketing, respond to media requests and/or social media activity ensuring that the release of information is in accordance with the family or next-of-kin's wishes, the University's privacy considerations and the University's Emergency/Crisis Response Policy (if applicable). Ensure that broad communication messaging has been approved by the family or next-of-kin prior to release.

Review Process

The Response Team will conduct an evaluation of the response to any student death and make recommendations to the Office of Student Affairs as necessary to modify the procedures or response processes.

Review Period: 5 years;

Next Review Period: 2029-2030;

Related Policies and Procedures: N/A

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