

# Coping with a Student Death

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<http://international.tamu.edu/iss>*

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## Texas A&M University

### General Information

College Station, TX  
49,000 students  
Sixth-largest university in the U.S.

### International Population:

4,600 (3,600 graduate) plus dependents  
Top countries: India, China, Korea, Mexico  
International student organizations: 50+

### Campus Resources

Student Counseling Services  
Student Health Center  
Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT)  
[tellsomebody.tamu.edu](mailto:tellsomebody.tamu.edu)  
University Police Dept  
Student Legal Services



## Rationale

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- ❖ Restructuring of our emergency protocol system
- ❖ We are not perfect! These are ideal suggestions
- ❖ Hope that you can learn from our experiences & lessons learned
- ❖ ISSS = International Student and Scholar Services
- ❖ Handouts
  - My Action Plan
  - Intake Form
  - Additional Details
  - In Case of Emergency
  - Sample Emergency Cards

## Before a Student Death Occurs

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## Outreach

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- ❖ Determine & document campus and community infrastructure
  - Student affairs
  - Counseling services
  - Legal advice & counsel
  - Police
  - Hospitals, healthcare & urgent care facilities
  - Mental health facilities
  - Funeral homes
  
- ❖ Encourage representatives from key campus & community services to inform you if there is an emergency involving an international student!

## Outreach

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- ❖ Campus emergency response plan
  - Campus-wide protocol
  - Offices involved
  - Your role in the campus emergency response plan
  - Reporting infrastructure
  
- ❖ Identify Liaisons
  - Cultural
  - Religious
  - National/Regional
  - Translators

## Education

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- ❖ Prior to arrival
  - Explain importance of health, life & repatriation insurance
  - Describe role of US Police & other emergency services (i.e., calling 911)
  - Inform about services on campus & in community
  - Advise students to bring copies of:
    - Medical records
    - Prescriptions
    - Proof vaccinations

## Education

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- ❖ Upon arrival to US, advise students to:
  - Keep important documents in a safe place and tell a trusted family member or friend where they are
  - Always carry important documents
  - Always carry emergency contact card
  - Designate emergency contacts
  - Purchase health, life & repatriation insurance
  - Name beneficiaries for bank accounts & insurance
  - Create and maintain legal documents
    - Will, especially if student is married or has children
    - Durable Power of Attorney/Living Will
    - HIPAA Release form
  - Register as an organ donor, if wish to do so
  - Inform ISSS if there is an emergency involving an international student

## Education

- ❖ Remind current students to:
  - Continue to update emergency contacts
  - Continue to update personal contact information
  - Stay up to date on important preventative measures
  - Keep emergency contact cards up to date
  
- ❖ Communication methods
  - Email to admitted students before arrival
  - Email to newly arrived students
  - Website
  - Handouts in office and at functions
  - Orientation programming—online and in-person
  - Include in materials mailed with I-20s and DS-2019s
  - Spouse/family outreach programs
  - Inform through student leaders, student organizations

## Internal Preparation & Policies

- ❖ ISSS Emergency Protocol
  - On-call system: mobile phone or pager
  - Identify your team & back-up support
  - Central file/binder with important emergency protocol details
  - Contact info for all ISSS staff/others to be contacted
  - Student emergency intake form for incident details
  - Procedure for former students still on your document
  - How to find information about insurance coverage
  - Update protocol after each incident or as needed
  
- ❖ Train ISSS Staff
  - Emergency protocol of office & campus
  - QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Training for Suicide Prevention: <http://www.qprinstitute.com>
  - Simulated emergency situations or case studies

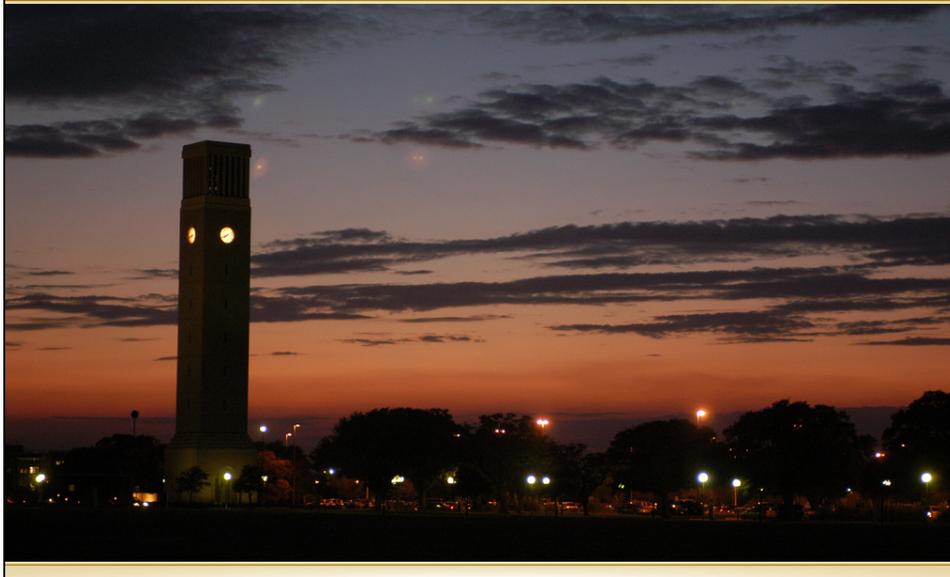
## Internal Preparation & Policies

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- ❖ Maintain resource materials
  - Links to applicable campus rules; county/city, state & federal, international laws
  - List of Visa Waiver Program countries
  - List of countries with no US Consulate or Embassy
  - Information about Consular Notification
  - List of contact details for local Consulates or equivalent
  - Campus & community resources
  - Cultural customs related to death & mourning  
(i.e. CultureGrams: <http://online.culturegrams.com>)

## When a Student Death Occurs

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# Initial Fact Gathering

## Remember: Every case is unique!

- ❖ Use an Intake Form to gather facts
  - Informant information
  - Student information
  - Incident details
  - Course of action
  
- ❖ Exchange contact information with informant

# Emergency Response Intake Form

Type of Emergency: \_\_\_\_\_ Received by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date & Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**Initial Informant Details**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation to Texas A&M: \_\_\_\_\_ Affiliation to student: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Details**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ UIN: \_\_\_\_\_ Visa Type: \_\_\_\_\_

Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_ Dependents? Yes No

REEP: Yes No Sponsored: Yes No Academic Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree level: Undergraduate Masters Doctorate Non-degree Other: \_\_\_\_\_

University employee? Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Dependent details: \_\_\_\_\_

Roommate(s)/Significant other: \_\_\_\_\_

Religious affiliation(s), if any: \_\_\_\_\_

**Emergency Contacts**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ English speaking? Yes No

Relation to student: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ English speaking? Yes No

Relation to student: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Information**

Has the family been contacted: \_\_\_\_\_ Who will contact the family? \_\_\_\_\_

Current family location: \_\_\_\_\_ English speaking? Yes No

Language(s) spoken by family: \_\_\_\_\_

Is the family planning to visit the US? Yes No When? \_\_\_\_\_

# Emergency Response Intake Form

Limit your responses to factual information!

**Incident Details**  
What happened? \_\_\_\_\_  
Where did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_  
Where did it happen? \_\_\_\_\_  
Are there multiple locations involved? Yes No If yes, please list: \_\_\_\_\_  
Where is the student currently located? \_\_\_\_\_  
How was the student identified? \_\_\_\_\_  
How many students/other individuals are involved? \_\_\_\_\_  
Who knows? What do they know? \_\_\_\_\_  
What else, specific to this incident, needs to be clarified? \_\_\_\_\_  
**In Case of Health Emergency**  
Health insurance information: \_\_\_\_\_  
Hospital or urgent care facility: \_\_\_\_\_  
**In Case of Death**  
Life insurance information: \_\_\_\_\_  
Where is the body located? \_\_\_\_\_  
Has an autopsy been ordered? Explain details if known: \_\_\_\_\_  
**Follow-Up**  
Informant will: \_\_\_\_\_  
I will: \_\_\_\_\_  
\*Use additional pages if necessary.

© 2010 Staff Emergent (Emergency) procedures/strategies response intake form Last Updated: 03/14/10 By: S&P

# Informing others

- ❖ Inform key individuals, which may include:
  - Family
  - Consulate/Embassy
  - Police
  - Significant Other(s), Children
  - Roommate(s)
  - Friends
  - Your immediate supervisor & colleagues
  - Academic staff: Dean, Professors, Advisor
  - Institution staff: Payroll, HR, Financial Aid, Business Services
  - Clubs or organizations
  - Religious association
  - Cultural/religious liaison
  - Translator
- ❖ Coordinate response to media inquiries, if applicable

## Coordination with Family

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- ❖ Ask family to identify spokesperson
- ❖ Ask family to sign permission letter granting someone else to communicate on their behalf
- ❖ Contact info for all those involved to share with family
- ❖ Determine & research family's cultural/religious/political background
- ❖ Determine if family has a designated translator and/or cultural/religious liaison
- ❖ Prepare for family's arrival
  - Create letter to Embassy for visa process if necessary
  - Encourage family to purchase travel insurance
  - Determine who will meet family at airport
  - Determine offices the family wants to meet
  - Coordinate meetings with key officials and offices that family specifies
  - Hold cultural briefings with each office prior to family meetings
  - Create general itinerary & info sheet for family and key offices

## Coordination with Friends

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- ❖ Identify one friend as contact person for all friends
- ❖ Educate friends about boundaries
- ❖ If necessary/requested, schedule group counseling session
- ❖ When they ask, give friends something to do:
  - Collect photos to share with family, compile in CD/album
  - Assist family with meals & visiting at hotel
  - Arrange volunteer/driving schedule
  - Arrange funeral services
  - Assist with handling student's affairs: car, belongings, lab/office, USPS mail forwarding, etc.

## Coordination with Other Offices

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- ❖ Police
- ❖ Medical facility
- ❖ Legal Council
- ❖ Consulate/Embassy
- ❖ Insurance company
- ❖ Funeral home
- ❖ Counseling services

## Coordination within ISSS

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- ❖ Inform supervisor and colleagues of what happened
- ❖ Rearrange workload to focus on case
- ❖ Brief office about cultural considerations specific to this case
- ❖ Keep detailed notes on case
- ❖ Update emergency resources as you collect information

## Coordination of Funeral/Memorial

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- ❖ Important to have a memorial service even if family will not be present
- ❖ Ensure cultural/religious liaison is involved in the planning
- ❖ Determine academic/institution officials to speak at funeral
- ❖ Advise attendees on giving the family cards, flowers, etc.
- ❖ Arrange for program to be printed in English and native language
- ❖ Provide family with written copies of translated speeches
- ❖ Find out family's wishes for preparing the body—be specific
- ❖ Plans for cremation or repatriation

## Aftermath & Follow-up

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## Family, Friends & Community

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- ❖ Give final list of contacts to family
- ❖ Determine if we can or may provide assistance to families once they return to home
- ❖ Inquire about financial hardship to family/roommates still in US
- ❖ Provide info about common characteristics of grief
- ❖ Encourage friends & family to find a survivors group
- ❖ Important to provide friends with opportunity for closure
  - Texas A&M: Silver Taps, Muster
- ❖ Respect differing views about referencing the deceased

## Institution & ISSS Office

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- ❖ Academic Ramifications
  - Confer Degree
  - Outstanding fees/bills
  - Institution property that needs to be returned
- ❖ Closure for advisors, professors, classmates, co-workers
  - Debrief meeting for those involved
  - Recommend professors acknowledge student absence, discuss feelings
- ❖ Thank you notes to those involved
- ❖ Review international office response
  - What worked
  - Issues to resolve
- ❖ Immigration Tasks
  - SEVIS termination

## You

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- ❖ Determine your office's policy for assisting staff members to decompress after handling such an incident
- ❖ Make sure you take time to recover from the stress of the case
- ❖ Take advantage of any institutional or community resources for debriefing/counseling

## Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

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- ❖ Interacting with the family
  - Look at them when speaking, not the translator
  - Take business cards to all meetings
  - Have beverages & snacks on hand to offer family
  - Find appropriate, private location for family meetings
  - Don't be surprised if family wants to see the body
  - May be very difficult for you to understand/accept the family's wishes or beliefs
- ❖ Funeral home
  - Will assist with obituary
  - Can advise on number of death certificates to order
- ❖ Work with funeral home & Consulate to make sure paperwork is completed for taking remains home

## Lessons Learned

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- ❖ Translator
  - Language is not the only factor—must consider political, religious, cultural background of translator & family
  - Try not to use someone that was very close to the deceased student
- ❖ Organ Donation
  - Not all families will accept a student's wishes to be an organ donor
  - Make sure you become familiar with your State's laws about organ donation

## Lessons Learned

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- ❖ Unique to suicide
  - Counseling is even more crucial
  - Surviving students may be at a higher risk of suicide
  - More likely that an autopsy will be ordered despite family's wishes
  - Can be more difficult for family to accept
    - Family may reject the truth
    - How the family chooses to respond and share the news may surprise you
  - Grieving process compounded by question of "Why"?
  - May not be eligible for repatriation or life insurance
  - Will need to take a look at events leading up to suicide to determine if institution responded appropriately to any warning signs

## Lessons Learned

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- ❖ General lessons
  - Never make assumptions
  - If you or the family have doubts, ask
  - Seek out and accept all help
  - No need to correct (or encourage) the gossip mill
  - Try not to defend, judge, feel obligated to fix things
  - Doesn't help to say "it will be ok" – family & friends need space and time to grieve
  - You are stronger than you might think

## References

- ❖ Burak, Patricia A. and William W. Hoffa, editors. *Crisis Management in a Cross-Cultural Setting*. National Association of International Educators (NAFSA): 2001 ed.
- ❖ Drolesky, Suzanne. *Handling Critical Incidents with Students*. International Programs for Students, Texas A&M University: 2008.
- ❖ Lipson, Charles. *Succeeding as an International Student in the United States and Canada*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2008
- ❖ Personal Meetings with Texas A&M Staff:
  - Mr. Richard Damell, Assistant Director, Student Health Services
  - Dr. Suzanne Droleskey, Assistant Vice President, International Programs for Students
  - Mr. Scott Gatlin, Detective, University Police Department
  - Dr. Gisela Lin, Psychologist, Student Counseling Services
  - Mr. Travis Lively, Detective, University Police Department
  - Mr. Rick Powell, Attorney, Student Legal Services
  - Ms. Desiree Rieckenberg, Coordinator, Critical Incident Response Team
  - Ms. Krista Tacey, Director, International Student Services
  - Mr. Bill Taylor, Associate Director, International Student Services
  - Ms. Courtney Waggoner, Patient Services Manager, Student Health Services

Questions?

