

Coping with a Student Death

Samantha Clement, International Student Advisor II
Adrea Dottavio, International Student Advisor II
Emily Yates, International Student Advisor II

*International Student Services
Texas A&M University
<http://iss.tamu.edu>*

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General Information

College Station, TX

50,000 students

Sixth-largest university in the U.S.

International Population:

4,780 (3,780 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

University Police Dept

Student Legal Services



Rationale

- ❖ 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
 - Emergency Response Intake Form
 - In Case of Emergency Handout
 - Sample Emergency Cards

Before a Student Death Occurs



Outreach

- ❖ 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

- ❖ 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

- ❖ 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

- ❖ 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

- ❖ 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



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: _____

When 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

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

- ❖ 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

- ❖ 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

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

Coordination within ISSS

- ❖ 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

- ❖ 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



Family, Friends & Community

- ❖ Respect differing views about referencing the deceased
- ❖ Give final list of contacts to family
- ❖ Provide info about common characteristics of grief
- ❖ 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
- ❖ Encourage friends & family to find a survivors group
- ❖ Important to provide friends with opportunity for closure
 - Texas A&M: Silver Taps, Muster

Institution & ISSS Office

- ❖ 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
- ❖ Send a Thank you note to those involved
- ❖ Review international office response
 - What worked
 - Issues to resolve
- ❖ Immigration Tasks
 - SEVIS termination

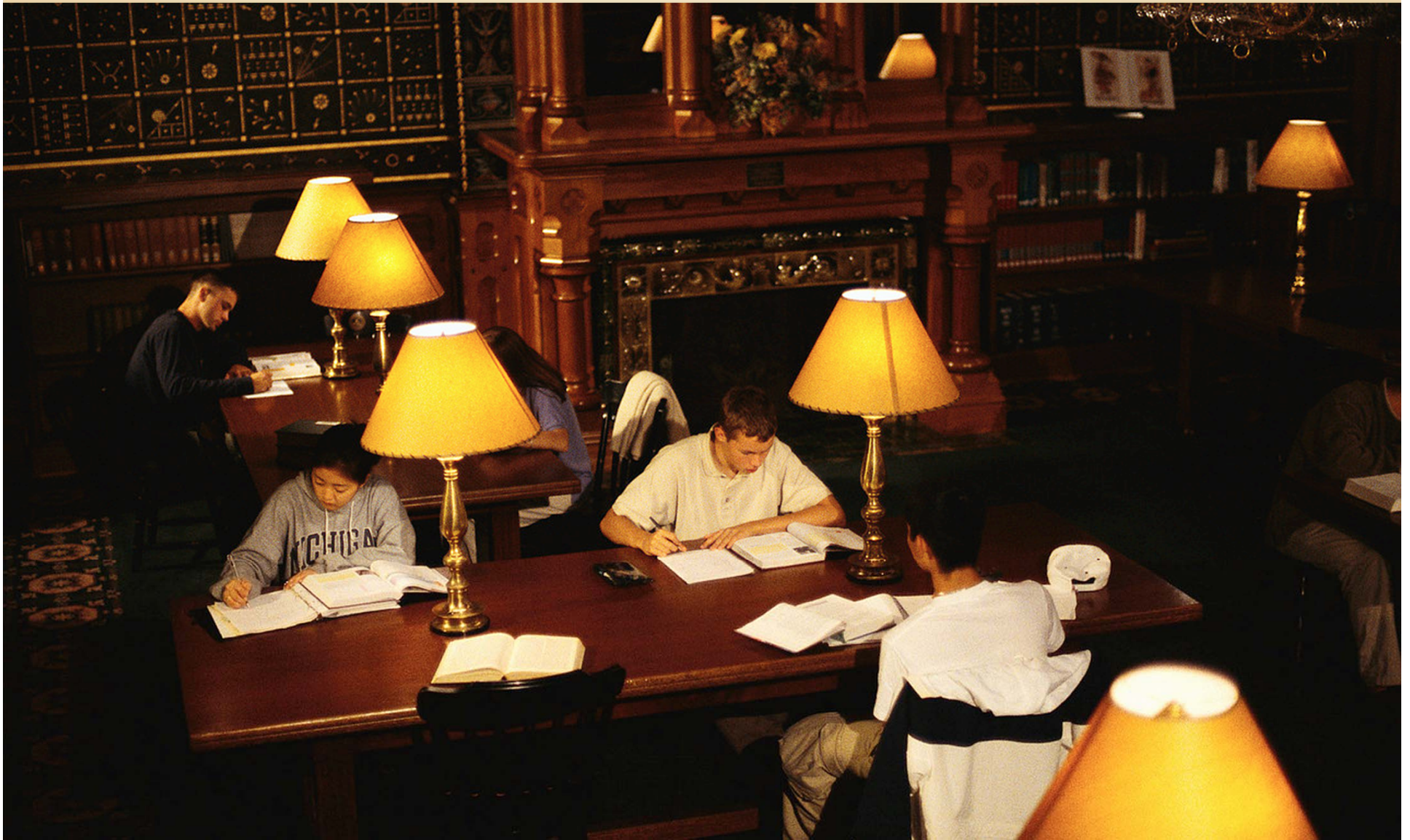
Take Care of You

- ❖ 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

BREAK!



CASE STUDY TIME



Case 1: Pool Accident

- Saturday night at 10:00pm and the local police calls the ISSS phone
- Student dove into the shallow end of the pool and has been transported to the ER
 - Student's Name: Minjoon Seok
 - Native Country: South Korea
- Sunday morning you are visiting with the friends at the hospital and giving advice on how they can help
- The family was notified by a friend and is planning to arrive in the U.S. by Thursday afternoon
 - Note: South Korea is on the visa waiver program
- Friday morning the family requested the student is taken off life support
- The Korean pastor of a local church will prepare for the memorial service and funeral arrangements.

Case 2: Suicide

- 8:00pm Friday night – Local law enforcement calls ISS emergency phone
- Student was found dead in her apartment and the death was ruled a suicide
 - Student Name: Mei
 - Country: Taiwan
- Throughout the weekend, Mei's friends call you asking how they can help
- On Tuesday, Mei's parents and one sibling came to the U.S. and are accompanied by officials from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center to meet with representatives of your campus
- Both a Buddhist ritual for the family and an open funeral service for friends is conducted.
- Cultural stigma surrounding suicide.

Case 3: Car Accident

3:00am, Saturday
Single car accident
Male student from Iran

Start receiving calls from friends on Saturday
Mother is in U.S.; student was on way to pick her up

No Iranian Embassies in U.S.; interest section at Pakistani Embassy
Family will remain in Iran

Family wishes to have body sent to Iran as soon as possible
Friends decide to arrange local memorial service; mother will attend

Father listed as beneficiary on account
Funds cannot be sent to Iran via the U.S.

Lessons Learned



Lessons Learned

- ❖ 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
 - Research appropriate customs for the student's culture
- ❖ Funeral home
 - Will assist with obituary
 - Can advise on number of death certificates to order
 - Cremation information if necessary
- ❖ Work with funeral home & Consulate to make sure paperwork is completed for taking remains home

Lessons Learned

❖ Translator

- Language is not the only factor
 - 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

- ❖ 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

❖ 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 Darnell, 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?

