SUMMARY:

The death of a student is a tragedy for the family and friends of the deceased and a significant loss for the University community as well. This policy provides clear and consistent instructions as to the actions to be taken and the notifications to be issued in the event of a student death.

POLICY:

I. Initial Response to a Student Death

A. Occurring on Campus

1. The first responder should call 911 immediately. The University Department of Public Safety, along with the City of Conway Police Department and/or the Horry County Police Department, will respond, and establish and maintain control of the scene.

2. At the first opportunity, the Chief of the University Department of Public Safety will notify the South Carolina State Law Enforcement Division of the death. SLED is responsible for investigating unnatural deaths or deaths under suspicious circumstances.

3. The Chief of the University Department of Public Safety will notify the Campus Emergency Management Team, which includes the Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA), as soon as is practicable. The appropriate members of the team will convene at least once with a briefing from the Chief.

4. The VPSA will determine, verify and supply the following information about the deceased student to the University Department of Public Safety and to the Horry County Coroner:
   a. name;
   b. age/date of birth;
c. hometown;
d. employment contact information, on or off campus;
e. class status;
f. RMAS (Room Assignment) information and roommates; and
g. campus affiliations.

5. It is the responsibility of the Horry County Coroner, in collaboration with the VPSA, to notify the student’s family of the death. The VPSA will serve as the University’s official contact with the family.

6. Depending upon the cause of death and the police investigation, area clean-up may require departmental plans to be implemented due to the inability to use/occupy the area on campus.

7. Hazardous clean-up may need to be coordinated through the Environmental Health and Safety Department.

B. Occurring Off-Campus During the Academic Year

1. Anyone becoming aware of the death of a student that occurred off-campus should immediately inform the VPSA.

2. The VPSA will verify the information and notify the President, the Executive Vice President/Chief Operating Officer, the Provost and the Office of University Communication as soon as possible.

3. The President, or his/her designee, will determine if the Campus Emergency Management Team should convene depending upon the circumstances of the death (e.g., if the student died while engaged in University activities/travel; if the death was accidental or criminal, etc.).

C. Occurring Off-Campus Not During the Academic Year

1. Anyone becoming aware of the death of a student that occurred off-campus should immediately inform the VPSA.

2. The VPSA will verify the information and notify the President, the Executive Vice President/Chief Operating Officer, the Provost and the Office of University Communication as soon as possible.

D. In All Cases

1. The VPSA will be the primary point of contact for the student’s family. When appropriate, the VPSA will assist the family in making arrangements to come to campus, reserve local accommodations, take care of University business, and other related assistance as needed.

2. The Director of News and Public Affairs and the Chief of the University Department of Public Safety, in consultation with University Counsel if applicable, will determine the appropriate timing for, and the content of information to be shared in, a public announcement and a release to the press.
Said announcement and press release will be disseminated by the Office of University Communication.

II. Campus Communication and Actions

A. The Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs will:

1. Provide email notification of the student’s death to: the Dean of the College the student was enrolled in, the student’s current professors, the student’s Academic Advisor, the SGA, and any campus employer of the student.
2. Send a mass email to the campus community at large (after professors, family, friends, etc., have been notified) including the student’s major, hometown, and grade level. A follow-up email may need to be sent to include funeral arrangements and information regarding a campus memorial service.
3. Notify and coordinate with other offices and departments, such as, but not necessarily limited to, those listed below, regarding student records, personal items, and return of University property. Include the student’s CCU ID number and the date of death. [If the campus Emergency Management Team (EMT) is called to convene, most of these areas will be notified at some level by the respective EMT member.]
   a. Office of the President – including information so that flowers/memorials may be sent
   b. Office of the Provost
   c. Office of University Communication
   d. Information Technology Services
   e. University Housing
   f. Dean of Students Office
   g. Counseling Services
   h. Student Health Services
   i. Office of the Registrar
   j. Office of Student Accounts
   k. Financial Aid & Scholarships
   l. Office of Student Activities and Leadership
   m. Kimbel Library
   n. Department of Public Safety
      1) Parking
   o. Alumni Affairs
   p. Dean of College in which the student was enrolled
      1) Advisor
      2) Professors
   q. If applicable:
      1) Athletics
      2) International Programs and Services
4. Prepare a “Certificate of Memoriam” (for attendance) and provide same to the Office of the President for inclusion with the President’s letter of condolence to the family of the deceased student, or assist with processing/awarding of posthumous degree if applicable, sending letters of invitation to the family. Accompany family to the appropriate ceremony, e.g. Commencement, Day of Remembrance.

5. If the deceased student is eligible to receive a posthumous degree (see II.H.6.), the VPSA is responsible for ensuring the degree is presented to the parent(s) of the deceased student. Upon receipt of the posthumous degree from the Registrar’s Office, the VPSA will coordinate with the family of the deceased to determine how they would like to receive the degree – either by the University President awarding it at the Commencement Ceremony respective to the deceased student’s last semester of enrollment, or by other means. It is the choice of the parents of the deceased student by what manner the degree is awarded.

6. Attend funeral, or arrange for a University Representative or Alumni Representative to attend funeral if possible. Provide assistance to students who attend funeral, e.g., note or email to professor(s) regarding student absence if requested by the student.

7. In conjunction with the Dean of Students, work with students who may be significantly affected by the death by making referrals to appropriate services and contacting instructors.

B. Dean of Students Office will:

1. After family notification by the VPSA, and in collaboration with University Housing, inform the deceased’s roommates, and friends, etc., along with their professors, of the student’s death via email or phone.
2. Provide assistance to students who attend the funeral, e.g., note to professor(s) or email to professor(s) regarding student absence as requested.
3. Follow up with friends of the deceased student as needed.

C. Office of University Communication will:

1. Handle all media inquiries.
2. Will determine, in collaboration with the Chief of the University Department of Public Safety, and in consultation with University Counsel if applicable, the appropriate timing for, and the content of information to be shared in, a public announcement and a release to the press. Said announcement and press release will be disseminated by the Office of University Communication.
D. Information Technology Services will:

1. Change the password for the deceased student’s accounts for WebAdvisor, Blackboard, Moodle, and campus email to prevent unauthorized access. Once this is accomplished, all of the student’s accounts will follow the normal process of retirement.
2. Inform the surviving parent(s) that, upon review and approval by the University Counsel of their written request, the student’s emails can be forwarded to them.

E. University Housing will:

1. Support law enforcement with controlling and securing the scene and with any investigative needs.
2. Notify deceased student’s roommates/suitemates if student death occurred on campus. Coordinate the relocation of roommates/suitemates to another location if requested. If death occurs during the summer months when student is away from campus, notify roommates from the previous year and the upcoming year.
3. Work in partnership with Counseling Services staff to provide appropriate support for residents.
4. In coordination with the VPSA and the deceased’s family, facilitate the return of his/her property from the residence hall.
5. Refund a prorated amount of meal plan and room fee charges based on by-the-day costs for the term in which the death occurred.
6. Work with the CINO Card Specialist to review and cancel any building card access or key the deceased student may have had.
7. If the death occurred in or around a University Housing facility, University Housing Facilities will coordinate or perform repairs and cleaning as necessary and appropriate, after the Coroner and the police complete their investigation.

F. Counseling Services will:

1. Coordinate psychological counseling and emotional support for those requesting same.
2. Seek out students and staff who might have been deeply affected by the student’s death – such as significant others, friends, roommates, classmates, teammates, others living in the same building as the deceased student – and offer additional services as appropriate.
3. Assist with support for deceased student’s family if needed.
4. Work with other offices and individuals on campus to arrange vigils or memorial services, if appropriate.
5. Plan annual “Day of Remembrance” in conjunction with the Student Government Association (SGA).

G. Student Health Services will:

1. Close the deceased student’s private health records and mark as “DECEASED.”
2. Maintain confidentiality of deceased student’s health records unless request for same is approved through the Records Disclosure Procedure as outlined in III. A. and B. of this policy.
3. Provide assistance as directed by the VPSA.

H. Registrar’s Office will:

1. When notified of a student death by the President, Provost, or Vice President of Student Affairs, place a “DC” (deceased) privacy code on the student’s academic record. This code prevents unauthorized access to the deceased’s record within the student information system and alerts University departments that no additional communication should be sent to the deceased student, the student’s parents, legal guardian or spouse.
2. Obtain external verification of the student’s death for inclusion with the academic record. External verification is generally obtained through online news articles (in the case of accidental death) or by obituary.
3. Process an official University Withdrawal Form, utilizing the date of death as the date of withdrawal. Close the student’s official record, and mark it with a privacy code of “DC” for deceased.
4. Mark the local and permanent mailing addresses as “former” in order to block the mailing to, or generation of mailing labels for, a deceased student.
5. Provide notification of the death and processed withdrawal to the VPSA, the Provost, the Dean of Students, the Vice President for Enrollment Services, the CIO/Assistant Vice President for Information Technology Services, the Associate Vice President for University Communication, the Department Chair and Dean of the deceased’s academic major, and the Directors of the Departments of Financial Aid, Student Accounts, University Housing and Alumni Affairs.
6. Audit the deceased student’s academic record to ensure the conservation of complete and accurate records and electronic data base elements (e.g., admission data, grades, registration activity, etc.) such that the information is intact and viewable in the student information system and optical imaging system. All semester, course, grade and other academic notations will remain on the student’s record.
7. Determine whether the deceased student is eligible to receive a posthumous degree and report that finding to the VPSA.
a. Prior to graduating, any undergraduate student who died while officially enrolled at the University (Fall and Spring Semesters, or during a summer or interim period following a major semester of enrollment), and who was within 18 credit hours of completing the degree requirements of the academic program/major of record, is eligible to be awarded a posthumous bachelor’s degree.

b. Prior to graduating, any graduate student who died while officially enrolled at the University (Fall and Spring Semesters, or during a summer or interim period following a major semester of enrollment), and who is within 9 credit hours of completing the degree requirements of the academic program/major of record, is eligible to be awarded a posthumous Master’s degree.

c. The Registrar’s office will review the deceased’s completed credit hours. If the credit hours are within the range where a posthumous degree may be considered, the Registrar’s Office will request a formal graduation audit from the Department Chair of the student’s major and Academic Dean to verify the actual remaining hours.

d. If the posthumous degree is approved by the Chair/Dean of the College in which the deceased student was enrolled, the Registrar’s Office will receive final certification from the Provost, notify the VPSA of the awarding of the degree and order the degree. Upon receipt, the Registrar’s Office will furnish the posthumous degree to the VPSA.

I. Office of Student Accounts will:

1. Settle the deceased student’s financial accounts with the University, in conjunction with other appropriate offices, and process allowable refunds.

2. Allowable refunds include:
   a. Prorated refund of tuition based on total days from start of semester’s classes to date of student death (less financial aid which needs to be returned to the appropriate agencies).
   b. Prorated refund of housing fees based on number of days occupied.
   c. Prorated refund of meal plan charge based on total days from start of semester’s meal service to date of student death.
   d. Parking permit fees.
   e. CINO Card balances.

3. Issue a refund check made payable to the deceased student’s estate and send it via USPS along with a letter of condolence from the Director of Student Accounts, once a Withdrawal From is received from the Registrar and approval is received from the VP for Finance and Administration.
J. Financial Aid & Scholarships will:

1. Collaborate with HREO to finalize any Federal Work-study remaining payroll payments and close any related employment records.
2. Perform a Return to Title IV funds calculation based on the deceased student’s actual last date of attendance, if applicable.
3. Ensure that the required funds are returned to the appropriate agencies.

K. Kimbel Library will:

1. Check to see if the student has any materials checked out of or rented from the library.
2. A list of any such materials will be forwarded to the VPSA to address. VPSA will return any University library materials found with the student’s belongings to the library.

L. Department of Public Safety/Parking Services will:

1. Secure site if the death occurred on campus. Contact Coroner’s office.
2. Serve as the point of contact with other law enforcement officials.
3. Notify the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) who, with the University Department of Public Safety, shall participate in a joint investigation of the death. SLED will lead the investigation.
4. Work directly with the Director of Environmental Health and Safety and the VPSA throughout any police investigation.
5. Review the deceased student’s parking record. If there are outstanding unpaid tickets, they will be voided.
6. Request return of the deceased student’s parking permit from the VPSA.
7. Expedite a refund of any parking permit fees.

M. Athletics will:

1. Inform appropriate coaching staff of the death of any student athlete.
2. Coordinate through the VPSA the return of any property that the student may have left at University athletics facilities to be delivered to the deceased’s family with other belongings.
3. Provide support for athletes as necessary

N. International Programs and Services will:

1. Serve as a point of contact to the international community.
2. Assist in securing translators, if needed.
3. Assist with notification of family, if needed.
O. Mail Services will:

1. Coordinate the collection and return of unretrieved mail to the deceased student’s family.
2. Ensure mail forwarding as necessary.

III. Access Within The Student Information System to a Deceased Student’s Record

A. After the “DC” deceased privacy code has been placed on the student’s record within the student information system, only select individuals with a specific need to know will have the ability to override the code and review the student’s record.

B. Each department/entity that needs access to the record in order to perform their duties must furnish a list of individuals that require deceased code override access to the University Registrar. The University Registrar will then apply the privilege to those individuals in the student information system.

C. As personnel changes are made within their offices, the director/leader of each department is responsible for providing updated access information (who to add or remove) to the University Registrar.

IV. Records Disclosure Procedure

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which protects the privacy of student educational records, does not extend past death. Non-educational records are governed by various other laws based on the record type. In order to ensure that the requirements of these laws are being adhered to, any request for information concerning a deceased student’s record must be reviewed by University Legal Counsel prior to release.