*CLAS Guidance for Unit Heads*

**When a Colleague Dies[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Unit heads have an important role to play when the news of a departmental colleague’s death is received.

**NOTIFICATION**

Someone in the department is often the first on campus to hear that a current or retired faculty or staff member is deceased. This person first contacted by the deceased colleague’s family or friend is sometimes a senior colleague rather than the current unit head. That faculty member should notify the unit head. The unit head should notify:

* The Human Resources Office [hro@gvsu.edu](mailto:hro@gvsu.edu) (ph 616-331-2215). HR can help the family with matters related to life insurance and other benefit details. HR also has the direct responsibility to inform University Communications.
* College Office ([clas@gvsu.edu](mailto:clas@gvsu.edu) and [antczakf@gvsu.edu](mailto:antczakf@gvsu.edu) ). The Dean will inform:
  + Provost’s Office (Mary Albrecht [albrechm@gvsu.edu](mailto:albrechm@gvsu.edu)).
  + President’s Office or Trustees as appropriate.
  + In many cases, it may also be appropriate to inform University Development.
  + The college faculty and staff in the case of the death of employees actively involved in their professional work.
  + Registrar’s Office

Liaison with University Communications will begin. Staff from the Dean’s office will offer assistance to the faculty and staff of the unit.

If the family of the deceased have not or may not have been notified yet, notify GVSU Public Safety so that they can arrange for notifications to be made. They will need the emergency contact address and number on file with Human Resources. Do not attempt further notifications until the police have made family notifications.

* Departmental colleagues (a good faith attempt to reach department colleagues before they read about this in the news will be appreciated). Explaining how notifications will be made and by whom can help avoid multiple messages going out with varying accounts of the details surrounding the death.
* If the deceased was teaching a course, those students will also need to be notified. The Registrar will facilitate this communication. It is recommended that this happen as soon as an appropriate plan of action for the completion of the course has been arranged and before or simultaneous with the university announcement. The [Associate Dean for Faculty Resources and Scheduling](http://www.gvsu.edu/clas/gretchen-galbraith-542.htm) can assist with advice on options for enabling our students to complete the course. If a plan for the completion of the course is not in place at the time that the faculty is notified, include a request to faculty that they not share this news with students.
* If the colleague had an area of responsibility involving the care of others, such as a live-in role in a residence hall or direct caring for lab animals, an immediate interim solution should be sought.
* Some colleagues are also alumni. Alumni Relations can adjust their database and relieve the family of receiving publications from GVSU addressed to the deceased.
* In the case of scholars who were quite active in their professional organizations, it may be appropriate to notify these organizations.
* If the faculty member was in residence in a living center on campus, ask the Dean of Student’s Office to contact Housing.

Though not needing immediate action, there may be other follow up necessary in those cases of the death of a current employee, such as

* Collection of keys or rekeying
* Removal of the employee from People Finder (by the Office Coordinator)
* Changes to contacts displayed on the unit website (unit webmaster)
* Notification of the rec center if the employee had a locker there
* Assisting family with the return of library books or a GVSU laptop that was in the employee’s possession at an off-campus location
* IT is notified by HR about any employee who leaves the university for any reason. The unit heads may want to liaise with IT if a special arrangement is desired.
* Liaison with the Web Team in Institutional Marketing if the employee was the sole administrator for your unit’s website.
* Liaison with the Office of Sponsored projects if the faculty member had a current grant
* Appropriate handling of any data files, especially for human subjects research or files that might contain G numbers. This data might reside on computers, on disk or on memory cards.
* Working with students actively involved in research with the faculty member who is deceased.
* Institutional Marketing if the deceased’s image is sometimes used in GVSU ads on TV, bus signage, etc.

In the case of a student’s death, the Dean of Students has an extensive notification checklist which is used. This includes the unit head. A representative of the college attends the student’s funeral/memorial service.

**NEWS, MEMORIALS and OBITUARIES**

University Communications will provide the official university announcement (UComm routinely runs the article by the unit head or the unit head’s designate). A good resolution photo accompanies this article so keeping photo files up-to-date is helpful. This announcement may also appear in GV Magazine and FORUM (which are University Communications’ publications).

Unit Heads are urged to work closely with University Communications (1-2221) so that key information can be provided for an appropriate [GVNow](http://www.gvsu.edu/gvnow/) article (which also serves as a media release). Information about the academic career, any memorial services, any fund the departed wished to have supported in lieu of flower, etc. can be passed on to University Communications. Unit Heads may feel most comfortable working with the communications specialist who regularly covers news in the unit (<http://www.gvsu.edu/ucomm/our-staff-4.htm> ).

The unit is welcome to make a memorial tribute for use on the departmental website, department alumni newsletter/magazine, and departmental social media. Please share the link to this memorial piece with University Communications (your departmental communications specialist) and the [Director of CLAS Communications and Advancement](http://www.gvsu.edu/clas/monica-johnstone-538.htm) ([clas@gvsu.edu](mailto:clas@gvsu.edu)) so that links to your memorial piece can be shared.

External media may produce an obituary and should do this in consultation with the family.

University Communications has assembled a collection of samples that may assist unit heads when composing memorial tributes and collecting key information to provide to University Communications. Here are samples of articles by University Communications:

* <http://www.gvsu.edu/gvnow/2017/campus-mourns-death-of-former-staff-member-9759.htm>
* <http://www.gvsu.edu/gvnow/2016/campus-mourns-death-of-faculty-member-9633.htm>

An example memorial tribute by a department on their websites can also be found at this link:

* <http://www.gvsu.edu/classics/barbara-flaschenriem-85.htm>

Unit heads should consider the **wishes of the family** (including a domestic partner) when planning tributes. As there are a range of terms in use for the relationships involved, none should be presumed. Preferences for degrees of privacy also vary. It is appropriate for a unit head to ask for the term used by the domestic partner (spouse, partner, etc.) and whether mention of that person or other family members is desired.

**Social media** may release partial news before the unit head is ready with more appropriate information. University Communications is poised to monitor social media and respond as appropriate for the university. The unit head should hold to these principles:

* allow the police notification to take place,
* ensure information gathered is accurate,
* uphold university communication standards
* honor the wishes of the family.

**Unit Head responsibility for flow of information**

News of this sort often reaches the ears of former colleagues even before the official article is released or memorial tribute posted. There is often a desire to attend any related services or contribute to memorial funds. Calls are sometimes directed to the President or Provost’s Office. Each situation is different, requests from the family vary, and these factors can change the pace of the release of news. It is the responsibility of the unit head or the unit head’s designate to be the point of contact and stay current with the progress on the making of announcements and any arrangements (such as new scholarship fund, memorial service details, estimate of when the article will appear, family requests, name of memorial Facebook page, etc.). Unit heads may call on the assistance of the College office at any point (ph 616-331-2495, [clas@gvsu.edu](mailto:clas@gvsu.edu) ).

**SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

**Death occurs on campus**

GVSU has a Crisis Team that is activated by Public Safety (GVSU Police Department) in the event that a death occurs on our campus. HR can direct employees to our [Encompass](http://www.gvsu.edu/healthwellness/stress-management-support-through-gvsu-345.htm#encompass) services, and students can receive counseling via the University Counseling Center when needed.

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| [**GVSU Police Department**](http://www.gvsu.edu/gvpd/)  Phone: 616-331-3255  1 Campus Drive Allendale, MI 49401 | [**University Counseling Center**](http://www.gvsu.edu/counsel/)  **Email:** [gvcounsl@gvsu.edu](mailto:gvcounsl@gvsu.edu)  **Phone:** 616-331-3266 **Fax:** 616-331-3215  204 Student Services 1 Campus Drive Allendale, MI 49401 |

Just as when a faculty/staff member is injured or medically ill, and transported to the hospital, when a faculty or staff member dies on campus Public Safety contacts the department where that person works and informs either the PSS in charge or speaks with the unit head.  University Communications is informed as well on any death.

**Family requests memorial gifts be directed to a fund at GVSU**

Unit Heads should have available to them succinct descriptions of the official fund names and purposes for any funds specific to their department. One of the existing funds might serve the purposes of the family. If the family of the deceased wants to explore setting up a new fund, the unit head may wish to assist them in making contact with [University Development](http://www.gvsu.edu/giving/contact-44.htm). It is possible to set up a fund and create a specific web link for giving to that fund, but new funds do take a little time to set up and to establish the online giving interface.

Development can also assist if a department or family members of the deceased wished that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to an existing fund. Development can make “personal URL’s” to certain funds for use during memorial or funeral services so a direct link can be given, and this makes the process easier for those wanting to make gifts in memory of the deceased. This process can be put in place relatively quickly.

**A student in your department dies**

For students, contact by Public Safety is made primarily with the Dean of Students.  If the student lives in housing, Public Safety would make contact with that office as well.  The Counseling Center would be contacted for any death on campus to assist if needed.  Contact may be made with a dean of a college, pending time available.  Unit heads should not assume that the dean has been told.

Departments are asked not to act unilaterally, but rather in concert with these entities.

In the case of off campus events, units may learn of a student’s death via news media. The unit head should make sure that the Dean of Students is aware, copying the Dean of CLAS.

Unit heads may wish to make personalized contacts with any faculty in their unit in whose courses the student is enrolled. Their classmates can be advised of the Counseling Services available to them.

Posthumous degree completion has been granted in some cases. To explore this possibility, contact the Registrar. The general rules are:

* fewer than 30 credits needed toward the bachelors, 6 for masters
* Good standing
* Support of the faculty within the department of the student major
* Department chair recommends to Dean
* Dean if supports, to Registrar
* Registrar to the President confirming the academic status

The Registrar works with department to determine how the diploma will be delivered to the survivors (different methods have been used).

**An AP employee associated with your unit dies**

Some units have one or more Administrative Professional employee associated with their department (or a group of related disciplines). These employees sometimes have responsibilities for compliance with government regulations or tasks that are key to the efficient and safe running of daily operations, so interim arrangements may be necessary to cover these responsibilities in addition to more universal considerations such as notifications.

* Safety oversight of labs, animal facilities, studios, etc.
* Oversight of other employees
* Appointments with students (such as in the case of professional advising)
* Upcoming event management
* Timely reporting (whether for regulation compliance or routine transparency)
* Inventory, purchasing or budgetary duties
* Teaching responsibilities
* Participation in research
* PI on a grant or a participant in grant reporting
* Recurring tasks (these range widely from data collection to updating of the catalog)

Appropriate notifications may include:

* Student workers
* Committees on which the deceased served
* Colleagues in units in which the AP served previous to the current unit
* Regulatory bodies (if the AP was the designated compliance officer)
* Administrative units with which the AP worked closely (such as Facilities, Records, other Advising offices on campus)

**A PSS employee in your department dies**

In addition to notifying the Unit Head of any previous departments in which the PSS employee may have worked, it will be helpful for you to notify the President of the union. The website for the Alliance of Professional Support Staff is <http://apssgvsu.org/>. Officers with email contacts are listed here: <http://apssgvsu.org/officers/>

Some coordination of communications going out from previous departments, your unit, and the union may be desirable to avoid duplication or accidentally straying from the wishes of the family.

When a currently serving PSS employee passes away, it is important to review her or his multiple roles. That person may have been serving in many capacities, such as the departmental generic email address contact, the web contact on your departmental site, as departmental webmaster, the emergency contact in the event of fire, on committees and advisory boards, etc. Some of these roles should be reassigned as soon as practical. The College Office will assist with coverage in the short term.

**Retirees predating current databases**

While a department may retrieve the vita of a recently current or retired faculty member from Digital Measures and may have a photograph stored electronically, this becomes less and less likely the earlier the date of retirement. It may be prudent to locate appropriate photos and CVs for all retirees in a place from which it is easy to retrieve them.

In some cases, the CLAS College Office or University Communications may have a photo of a retired person.

For a list of those who have retired from your department (and any precursor departments), contact the [CLAS Database Coordinator.](http://www.gvsu.edu/clas/heidi-nicholson-547.htm)

**Part Time Faculty**

Some part time faculty serve for a long period and are well remembered by colleagues and alumni. Mention of their passing may be appropriate for departmental websites or newsletters. There may be fewer records of these teachers (perhaps a vita and records of the courses taught only) and quite understandably less information about research and service activities.

**Colleagues with Multiple Affiliations and Constituencies**

Faculty and staff may be affiliated with more than one department, college or even institution which may present some additional partners in crafting appropriate celebrations of their legacy. For instance, Milt Ford served in English (CLAS) as well as Liberal Studies (BCoIS) and founded the LGBT Resource Center which now carries his name. Long careers tend to present more of this richness, and it may be very helpful to work with senior colleagues who overlapped more years of their careers than the current unit head may have. Some of the careers of our colleagues include

* Teaching in The Honors College
* Joint appointments at GVSU
* A previous department that may or may not exist now
* Joint appointments with a second university
* Athletics coaching
* Founding of centers
* Serving in an administrative post
* Chairing of a key task force
* Chairing of or long service on a governance committee
* Long-time advising of a club
* Producing major works of art displayed in public places, etc.
* Serving in public office
* Major fundraising role
* Long-running columns in local newspapers, popular blogs
* Mentorship of McNair or S3 students
* Long-time participation in a program such as Michigan Science Olympiad or community engagement project.
* The faculty member might be enrolled in a GVSU class.

**RECORDS UPDATES**

**Websites**

As soon as practical, units should perform a search of their own website and the GVSU website to spot any references to the deceased person that are now inappropriate (such as listing that person as a contact, as an active faculty member, as a current member of a committee). The CLAS college office ([clas@gvsu.edu](mailto:clas@gvsu.edu)) can act as a liaison to the GVSU web team and other campus web masters to have these references updated.

**Databases**

Any databases (for instance, mailing labels) of the department and college should also be updated. It can be distressing to the family of the deceased to continue to receive mail addressed to the deceased.

**Other files**

A copy of an obituary or tribute filed with any personnel records being held will become a resource the next time the department needs to write one and will help institutional memory concerning which retirees have passed on.

**Photo files**

Units should consider having appropriate photos taken of their personnel so that high resolution, professional photos are on file. These photos can be scheduled with University Communications: <https://am.gvsu.edu/amonline/default.aspx?AG=145&cbhide=Y&hide=p>

**Contact Information**

Up-to-date contact information from retirees may not be forthcoming if it is not requested. At alumni events and through departmental alumni communications, current information can be requested.

Toward the end of each summer, the college reminds tenure track faculty to update their contact details. Affiliate faculty, part time faculty, AP staff, and PSS employees attached to the unit may also benefit from a reminder.

**Suggestions for improving this document?**

CLAS welcomes suggestions for making this document as helpful to Unit Heads as possible given the enormous range of possible circumstances. Suggestions can be emailed to [clas@gvsu.edu](mailto:clas@gvsu.edu) .

1. In the case of the death of a student, the Dean of Students office manages the campus notification process. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)