

Questions and Concerns Faculty and Staff May Have Concerning Teaching, Advising and Personal Challenges We Face When a Student Dies

1. How do we address a class/group the first time we meet with them after a member of the class/group has died? It is clearly not an ordinary class or meeting day (especially if the death has happened the night before and has been announced that morning). How do we acknowledge the death in a sensitive manner when we may be feeling ill-equipped and/or too sad/shocked to believe that we can help the students process their emotions if needed?
2. When a death occurs on campus, and knowledge of how the student died may be circulating through the student grapevine but has not been made public, how do we uphold our obligation to protect the deceased student's and their family's privacy, while also responding to questions and concerns raised by students who seek us out for comfort and a clearer understanding of why what they heard to be the nature of the death would have happened?
3. What is the most appropriate way to support /help a student/adviser who is mourning the loss of a loved one—roommate, housemate, boyfriend, girlfriend, good friend, RA, etc.? What should we look for as signs that they may need more (spiritually and/or psychologically) than an empathetic listener and/or the support of their friends and family?
4. What can be expected of survivors in terms of student performance in class? How much leeway is recommended for late assignments/missing class? Is there a time when getting back to structure is healthier for survivors than taking time away from school/class demands?
5. Is there anyone employed by the College charged with doing follow-up with students who withdraw from the College as a result of the death of an SNC student with whom they had a strong friendship?

6. Sometimes the local news media request interviews with professors, advisors, or work supervisors of a student or young alum who has died tragically. Is there a College policy regarding these requests? Is it possible to protect faculty/staff/students from what, for some, may feel like intrusive, inappropriate, requests for comments about the deceased?

7. Does the College as an institution offer ways for supporting students who are affected by the death of another student, but who may not find comfort in the Catholic/Christian tradition of gathering together with others in prayer?

8. Are we institutionally equipped to provide “culturally competent” support (support that recognizes and attends to cultural differences) to family and friends of a student who has passed away?

9. How do we handle course material for a class that may be related to a death that has affected our students (a suicide for example) in a sensitive manner? The temptation is to avoid or ignore the topic, but is there a better way?

10. Last year the death of one of our students was publicly acknowledged as a suicide. Some students, staff, and faculty may have some assumptions about the Catholic position regarding suicide that may be inaccurate. What is the current Catholic teaching on suicide?

11. How do we negotiate theological differences in light of tragedy? How does one support a student when that student is making meaning out of the event from a theological framework very different from one's own?