

Policy 1315
Notification Regarding Death

Date of Current Revision: October 2023
Responsible Officer: Chief of Staff

1. PURPOSE

This policy provides for the proper notification to the university community regarding the death of a member of the university community. It will facilitate an appropriate response and record the information in university databases.

2. AUTHORITY

The Board of Visitors has been authorized by the Commonwealth of Virginia to govern James Madison University. See Code of Virginia § 23.1-1600; § 23.1-1301. The Board has delegated the authority to manage the university to the president.

3. DEFINITIONS

Division Head

The president, vice president, chief of staff, and/or director of athletics.

Member of the University Community

Current employee, student, or other individual affiliated with the university.

4. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all members of the university community.

5. POLICY

The university wishes to respond appropriately when notified of the death of a member of the university community. When a division head or the chief of staff to the president is notified that a member of the James Madison University community has died, the university will follow a specific set of procedures for the appropriate response.

6. PROCEDURES

6.1 Initial Notification

A member of the university community who learns of the death of a member of the university community, should notify the following office according to the connection between the university and the decedent:

- Current employee or affiliate: chief of staff, chief of police and Human Resources
- Current student: JMU Police and vice president of Student Affairs

6.2 Information Verification and Next-of-Kin Condolences and Preference

The administrator notified pursuant to section 6.1, or their designee, shall seek to obtain confirmation of the reported death from a reliable source through appropriate measures. This verification may be obtained from an appropriate law enforcement officer, known next-of-kin, obituary, or other appropriate reliable source. The administrator or designee should take all reasonable precautions to not be the first contact for the next-of-kin, lest the person not be aware of the reported death.

If the death occurs on campus or in the immediate area, the chief of police or designee will provide the university's formal condolences to the next-of-kin and learn their preference for communications by the university regarding the decedent. Preferences include future communications with next-of-kin; breadth of the university's communication of news of the decedent's death to the university community; what information they would prefer to be included and excluded from the notification.

6.3 Administrative Notification

As soon as the information and identity has been confirmed or verified, the chief of staff or Human Resource administrator notifies the appropriate division head.

Following information verification, the administrator or designee will forward relevant confirmed information to the President's Office, University Communications, other division heads, and the chief of staff. Each division head or designee shall be responsible for notifying areas within their division that need to have this information to maintain the accuracy of the university's internal records:

- Current students: University Registrar, Dean of Students, academic unit head, academic advisor, current instructors, Advancement Information Services
- Current employee or affiliate: Human Resources, Advancement Information Services, division head

6.4 University Community Notification

The spokesperson (or designee) will coordinate, in partnership with the appropriate office, a notice to be sent to faculty, staff, and students. Depending upon the circumstances of the death, the spokesperson would be the primary point of contact for additional statements or press releases to external audiences. These messages would be distributed after receiving agreement from the decedent's family or next of kin.

If there is a law enforcement investigation surrounding the death, and the identity has not been confirmed by law enforcement, University Communications coordinates with that agency before a university message is sent.

6.5 University Presence at Memorial Services

To facilitate the university's response to the death, the president's office will communicate with units and departments, as appropriate, for attendance at the funeral or memorial service,

correspondence with the family and other appropriate responses. The respective division head and chief of staff to the president may also be involved in the coordination of a campus memorial service. Individual divisions, departments, and offices will coordinate their individual responses and participation as appropriate and will follow university policies.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

All departments, offices, and employees that generate, receive, or maintain public records under the terms of this policy, are also responsible for compliance with Policy [1109](#) - Records Management.

8. SANCTIONS

Sanctions will be commensurate with the severity and/or frequency of the offense and may include termination of employment for employees, expulsion from the university for students, removal of affiliate status for affiliates, and loss of privileges and/or no trespass orders for any individual.

9. EXCLUSIONS

None.

10. INTERPRETATION

The authority to interpret this policy rests with the president and is generally delegated to the chief of staff.

Previous version: December 2020

Approved by the president: August 2003