

Dealing with a Death Abroad: Policies and Best Practices

While we hope that no international office ever has to manage the tragedy of the death of a student while abroad, a comprehensive risk management plan should include detailed information about how the institution would respond. This document aims to outline some of the high-level steps your institution should consider when creating your individual plan for dealing with a death abroad, whether it be a student, faculty, or staff member. At the end of the document, we also highlight some resources from across the field that could inform your planning and response.

Key elements to Include in your institution's protocol

- Know the key players for a death abroad – who is a part of your International Crisis Response Team? You may consider including:
 - Education Abroad
 - Student Affairs/Dean of Students
 - Housing and Residence Life
 - Counseling Center
 - Legal/General Counsel
 - Media/University Relations
 - University Risk Management
 - Campus Police
 - Human Resources (for faculty/staff)
 - Business/Finance contacts
 - Representative from travel agency (if used for program planning)
- Information and Documentation
 - Initial report to institution should include as much information as possible. Have a checklist of information that faculty (or whoever reports the incident) should gather.
 - Make a checklist for steps to take during immediate response, recognizing that each situation is unique.

Note that circumstances may require deviation from standard on-campus death notification protocol (e.g. – the event may already have media coverage or be circulating on social media)

Share instructions with students/participants on the program not to post anything on social media or share news before institution

- Logistics

Will a representative from your institution travel to the location – to help with carrying out program or other details?

Obtain death certificate (and translation, if applicable)

If student is on a third-party provider program, determine if other insurance coverage besides USG mandated coverage exists and work with colleague(s) regarding benefits

Discuss appropriate ways to express condolences to family - e.g. flowers, letters of sympathy, contributing to campus events in honor of student

Coordinate with family on their preferences to facilitate transfer of decedent's belongings

Follow up with USG mandated insurance provider and communicate with family on when they can expect various things (e.g. repatriation, benefits payments, etc.)

If study abroad program is still in progress, will the program continue? Will the program and/or program director need additional support?

- Pastoral Care

Decide how your institution might offer to provide support for the decedent's family

Assistance with travel to site

How to handle remains and any religious preferences