

Please find below a summary report of the APC's most recent meeting concerning the university's revised "postvention" policy and "best practices." Let me know if you have any questions. /Ken Zagacki

During its Dec 5, 2023 meeting, the APC met with Assistant Vice Chancellor for DASA Justine Hollingshead, Director of the Counseling Center Monica Osburn, and Director of Prevention Services Angel Bowers, to discuss the university's revised "Postvention" policy and "best practices". The meeting was called in response to a faculty "issue of concern" (IOC) in which a faculty member worried that the university's policy concerning announcing student deaths, as they understood the policy, did not allow for the notification of instructors who were teaching the deceased students.

As the faculty member communicated their concern to Faculty Senate Chair Herle McGowan, and then she conveyed that IOC to co-chair Greg Tourino and me, they believed it would be "foolish" to repeatedly email "to check in on a dead student," and that "our students" end up discovering information about student deaths from "Reddit," which the faculty member sees as a "poor substitute to an official university response." The faculty member went on to say: "Maybe this [the new policy] is a poor attempt to prevent suicide... but to us it just seems like a cynical PR strategy."

Greg and I invited the Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Division of Academic and Student Affairs, Doneka Scott, and Donna McGalliard, the Assistant Vice Chancellor, to join the APC's meeting. Neither was able to attend. Instead, the above-mentioned guests did present a detailed description of the university's revised postvention policy and best practices. We have attached their slide presentation here. The presentation focused on:

- * The major goals of the revised approach (e.g., stabilizing the crisis environment, reducing the risk of negative behaviors, supporting the aggrieved, etc.)
- * The new approach's key points (e.g., the postvention coordinator, the new team approach, information sharing practices, identification of high-risk persons, support for these persons, and family assistance)
- * Postvention process and schedule (e.g., follow-ups with faculty of deceased students, reviews of cases and procedures, checking with key campus stakeholders and partners, etc.)
- * The individuals and/or groups most impacted by student deaths (e.g., families, student cohorts, faculty, staff, administrators, etc.)
- * The challenges of which the university must remain mindful as the crisis unfolds (e.g., how to promote student and faculty "self-care," the response of mental health task forces, etc.)

After watching the presentation and raising a few additional queries, the APC was satisfied that the guests had addressed the IOC, the APC's concerns, and the questions previously sent to the APC about 1) the updated postvention procedures, 2) the persons notified about student deaths, 3) how the impact of social media was considered in developing the new procedures,

and 4) how faculty might handle social media rumors. Specific answers to these concerns can be located in the attached documents.

In respect to 3 and 4 above, the guests explained that dealing effectively with the challenges presented by social media--and, in addition, the news media--is a continuing issue they will have to grapple with and that these challenges were not handled very well in the past. They said there will be times when the news media reports on something the university has not commented on, but the university cannot say anything until the family has been notified. They also noted that on some occasions following a student's death, both family and law enforcement officials advise that no public announcements concerning those deaths be made. The university must wrestle with all of these constraints and exigencies.

The APC recommended to the guests that they 1) find ways to communicate (either through email, the creation of a postvention website, or face-to-face meetings) the new postvention policy and best practices to university faculty and staff, and 2) be invited to attend an upcoming Faculty Senate meeting to deliver a presentation similar to the one they provided to the APC.

The APC also recommends that Chair McGowan communicate this email, as well as the attached materials, to the faculty member who initiated the IOC.

Please Greg or me know if you have any additional questions.

Warm Regards,
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