The Coordinator Role in Responding to a UCM Employee Death

The coordinator acts as a compassionate link between the family and the campus community and facilitates the business aspects of the guidelines. He or she may assign others to help with some of the tasks, but is responsible for the outcome.

To assist the coordinator, the “Guidance for responding to the death of a UCM employee” contains a timeline listing all the necessary tasks. (There is also a final checklist to ensure all tasks have been completed).

The ideal coordinator has the necessary authority to accomplish the tasks. The coordinator or the person he/she assigns should have good interpersonal and communication skills.

While the campus death guidance is comprehensive, each death is unique and requires judgment to ensure a compassionate and supportive response from the campus.

How someone dies may affect the grieving process. It is important to address the emotions generated from a sudden or unexpected death. But it is also meaningful to remember that a person will be missed or has died, regardless of the circumstances of his or her death.

When the death occurs can also affect the campus response. If someone dies during winter shutdown or in summer, the coordinator can communicate the news when people return. Condolences should be sent to the family in a timely way, even if the ideal person to send the condolences is away. He/she can still send a note upon return.

The major steps a coordinator must take include the following:

I. The first step is to confirm that the death has occurred. The coordinator should document the source of the information and verify that the source is authentic. In some cases, this may involve contacting the coroner’s office or the UC Police. The responsibility for determining the level of verification needed rests with the coordinator.

II. The coordinator then needs to identify a family member who can represent the family's wishes. Explain to the family representative what areas need to be addressed, and when, and ask what information the family wishes to be released about the cause of the death. Inquire whether the family has made arrangements for a memorial service or funeral and ask whom they would like to include from the workplace.

If possible, the same coordinator should talk to the same family representative throughout the process. The goal of the communication is to keep the family informed and to coordinate with them when necessary. Try not to burden the family with unnecessary communications or many details. Think through all the questions or information before actually speaking to them.

III. Once the confirmation of the death has been made, the coordinator will contact the appropriate departments/units (Human Resources/Academic Personnel/Student Affairs) depending on whether the deceased was a staff member, a person in an academic position or a visiting scholar or postdoc.