



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA  
STUDENT GOVERNMENT  
*Department of University & Community Affairs*

Executive Memorandum

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To: Jennifer Belmont, Student Senate President  
The Honorable Student Senate

From: Andrew Cohen, Director of University & Community Affairs  
Cassandra Hanjian, Associate Director of Community Affairs

Subject: Initiative for University-Wide Memorial Services

Date: September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009

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**Purpose:**

In recent years, there have been a number of active students at the University of South Florida who have passed away during their enrollment. Due to varying levels of involvement, some students' death received more attention from the campus community than others. It is a goal of the Department of University & Community Affairs to establish a baseline to develop a standard and uniform memorial service in order to equally recognize all students if such unfortunate circumstances should come to pass.

**History & Research:**

The University of South Florida has experienced numerous student deaths in past years, but there has been a discrepancy in how the University has treated certain student deaths versus others. Even if one student is not involved in any extracurricular activities or organizations, it does not mean that his or her time at the University of South Florida was any less valuable than any other student's experience. The Department of University & Community Affairs hopes to recognize all students by organizing and holding a similar memorial service for each student that passes away during their academic career.

Similar memorial services are held throughout the state and across the country to memorialize students that pass away. Most universities hold memorial services annually to commemorate everyone that has passed away within the academic turn. However, the vision for this initiative is that a memorial service would occur after each individual student's death.

At Florida State University, a resolution is formed by the Student Government after a student passes away, and is sent to his or her parents, the Department of Student Affairs, and the Florida State University President. The Department of University & Community Affairs would employ a notification system similar to the process used at Florida State University to organize the event, but it is likely that it would be smaller in scope than an actual Executive Resolution. The Florida State University model provides the Department of University & Community Affairs with an idea of how to approach both the families of the deceased and University faculty and staff in order to put the beginnings of a memorial service in motion. This model also provides a quick and efficient system for response and organization of the event, as this is an occurrence that needs to be wrapped up in a timely manner. The Florida State University Student Government does not take responsibility for the service itself, which is something that this model proposes. The memorial services are largely organized by students themselves, although the Dean of Students works with any organizations the student was involved in, as well as close friends and family members to ensure their wishes are respected. In this proposal, the Dean of Students would largely be a liaison between administration, parents, and Student Government to help the process, but the organization and fulfillment of the memorial service would be placed in the hands of Student Government under the Department of University & Community Affairs.

The University of Central Florida remembers all students that passed away at the end of each academic year at an event called "Eternal Knights Memorial Service". This annual memorial service enables families, friends, campus leaders, and the University of Central Florida community to join together in commemoration of their "fallen knights". Unlike the University of Central Florida, the Department of University & Community Affairs, in conjunction with Student Government, foresees holding a memorial for each deceased student individually. The event is held in the University of Central Florida Student Union. The University of South Florida's counterpart of such an event would most likely be held in the Marshall Center, like the University of Central Florida, and would have a similar vision and mission statement. The Eternal Knights Memorial Service is more involved than the vision of this proposal, as it involves a reception after the ceremony for solely family of the deceased and the administration. Because the proposed memorial services would occur more frequently than the University of Central Florida counterpart, such a reception would not be needed, as only one family would be involved in the memorial service if they felt it appropriate. The service's expenditures included purchasing programs, flowers, sympathy cards to send to the family, postage, and facial tissue for the ceremony itself. They also provide a certificate for the family, in case a posthumous degree cannot be given on behalf of the deceased student, something the Department of University & Community Affairs would work to attain as well in a similar situation. The Eternal Knights Memorial Service receives limited help from the University of Central Florida's Student Government Association because their Division of Student Affairs is not incorporated with Student Government, and therefore the memorial service is not an Activities and Services funded event. Because of Student Government's lack of involvement, there is limited student involvement in the Eternal Knights Memorial Service, which is what the Department of University & Community Affairs hopes to avoid. Christa Coffey, the Director and Organizer for the Eternal Knights Service, said that due to the scope of the publicity campaign for the event, and the fact they need multiple families in attendance, Student Government involvement is minimal. Coffey also stated that they expect all notable staff and faculty to be in attendance at the service and coordinate their schedules so that they could attend. Student Government at the

University of South Florida would not go to such lengths to involve dignitaries, although they would be invited. The coordinators for this memorial service would be more concerned about having family and other students close to the deceased in attendance, although staff and faculty will be strongly and warmly encouraged to attend. Memorializing

Texas State University at San Marcos also holds an annual memorial service, "Bobcat Pause," each spring for any students, faculty, or staff that have passed away that year. William Patterson, the President of the Student Foundation, gave us a lot of insight into how this service is run. The main difference is that the proposed event to be held at the University of South Florida would only be for students that have passed away because it is put on by Student Government, whereas the Student Foundation at Texas State University – San Marcos is an auxiliary office of the University President and serves as a liaison between the President and students. Because of the Student Foundation's function at this university, it includes all the aforementioned groups. However, the format of the event is very close to the type of model the Department of University & Community Affairs. They use their budget for this event on flowers, invitations to family members of the deceased, poster boards, and programs for the service.

Larnell Vickers, the Student Body Vice President at the University of Florida, applauded us on our initiative to start a standard for memorial services at the University of South Florida. However, the University of Florida does not really have a set memorial service they provide for their students. The University of Florida only has memorial services for victims of tragic circumstances (i.e. car accidents) put on by the administration. Additionally, if students involved in certain organizations pass away that organization may choose to hold a memorial service for the member of their organization. Student Government is only involved in setting up the room for the memorial service when student organizations set up the service. This type of model is what the Department of University & Community Affairs hopes to avoid. It is important to not overemphasize the death of one student and not recognize others. By providing this kind of a baseline memorial service, Student Government will recognize each student equally, regardless of the deceased student's level of involvement.

The Department of University & Community Affairs also spoke with Nanci Newton from the Advocacy Program who agreed on the advantages of holding such Memorial Services on a case-by-case basis. Memorial services are designed to help those affected by an individual's death in the early stages of grieving. If such services were delayed, it would bring up all the old stages of grieving that should have been moved past at that point. Setting up these services in a timely manner after each individual's death is important, as to not have those close to the deceased revert back to the early stages of grief.

### **Proposed Outline of Memorial Service:**

Because the death of a member of the academic and campus community is such a difficult thing to deal with, it is foreseen that this memorial service should take place within 10 days of a student passing away. The Counseling Center would be involved with the psychological debriefings to address different student groups that the specific death has affected, and would not attend the memorial service unless it was an extremely complicated situation. The Counseling Center staff would also direct students wanting to be involved in the memorial services to the

Department of University & Community Affairs. The Department of University & Community Affairs would take the initiative, along with faculty representatives from the University, such as the Dean for Students, to contact family, organizations the student may have been involved in, and appropriate religious representatives to organize the memorial service. Staff from the Advocacy Program would be present at these services to provide emotional support for those in attendance. A picture board would be present at all memorial services in order to create a baseline for such a program. Appropriate speakers would be recommended to Student Government by other students that were close with the deceased, as well as the family. Any appropriate religious speakers would come from the Campus Ministry Association or outside faith-based organizations, recommended and deemed appropriate by the family of the deceased. The event would most likely be held in the Marshall Center Student Union, but the location is flexible depending on the deceased's family's wishes. This event would be funded by Student Government because of its commitment to the student body and would project the importance of all students, past and present, to the University. Student Government would also encourage participation by the student body in memorializing members of their community.

The Department of University & Community affairs hopes to create a place outside the Marshall Student Center to commemorate students that will be a recognizable feature on campus. This fixture, a forest green bench, will be integrated into the memorial service. At the end of each service, all in attendance will recess out to this designated spot, and a golden rose will be placed on the bench to symbolize the student's contribution to the University of South Florida community.

**Budget:**

Pro-Copy: 20" x 24" photo - \$15 un-mounted x 15 (students that passed away July 2008 – June 2009) = \$225 per year

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Bench with plaque: \$649

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Sign for bench: \$537.50

**Total: \$1,411.50**

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Andrew Cohen  
Director of University and Community Affairs

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Cassandra Hanjian  
Associate Director of Community Affairs

Order of Events for Student Memorial Dedication Ceremony – January 26, 2010

- 11:45 am – 12:15 pm – Prelude and music while guests arrive
- 12:15 – Greeting and opening by Cassandra Hanjian
- 12:20 – Placement of flower wreath by Dr. Genshaft and Juan Soltero
- 12:21 – Introduction of Dr. Genshaft by Cassandra Hanjian
- 12:22 – Dr. Genshaft's speech
- 12:25 – Introduction of Juan Soltero by Cassandra Hanjian
- 12:26 – Juan Soltero's speech
- 12:30 – Introduction of Andrew Cohen by Cassandra Hanjian
- 12:31 – Andrew Cohen's speech
- 12:35 – Unveiling of bricks and memorial by Andrew Cohen
- 12:40 – 12:45 – Closing remarks by Cassandra Hanjian

Checklist for Memorial

- ✓ Flowers ordered / on hand
- ✓ Set up taking place by 11:30 am
- ✓ Speeches approved and distributed
- ✓ CD given to technical staff
- ✓ Flowers passed out to families
- ✓ Bricks on hand for unveiling