INSTITUTIONAL DECISIONS TO SPONSOR MEMORIALS

FOR DECEASED COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

ALEXANDRA KAY ANDERSON

(Under the Direction of Merrily S. Dunn)

ABSTRACT

When a college student dies, student affairs professionals are often responsible for ensuring specific administrative processes are completed, providing emotional support for the campus community, and sponsoring memorials that facilitate formal mourning. This last responsibility has received little attention in the student affairs literature. Using a questionnaire distributed to senior student affairs officers across the United States, I sought to learn more about institutional memorial practices; common types of memorials; why institutions decide to sponsor or not sponsor memorials; and whether student type, type of death, or institutional values effect the likelihood that an institution would sponsor a memorial for a deceased student. Slightly more than a third of respondents reported that their institution always sponsors memorials for deceased students. The most common types of memorials were memorial services, posthumous degrees or certificates of attendance, and recognition at institutional ceremonies, such as commencement. Respondents from institutions that never sponsor memorials cited the difficulty of treating all students the same, although respondents from institutions that do sponsor memorials placed much less importance on uniformity. Honoring the deceased student's family's wishes or requests was the most important value when deciding to sponsor a memorial, followed by honoring requests from students.

Respondents also reported that their institution was most likely to sponsor memorials for well-known students, including athletes or online influencers, and less likely to sponsor memorials for fully online or non-degree seeking students. Institutions were also less likely to sponsor memorials for students who died by suicide or from a drug or alcohol overdose and least likely to sponsor memorials for students who died as a result of their involvement in criminal activity. There were significant relationships between institutional sponsorship practices and an institution's basic Carnegie classification, control, religious affiliation, and approximate number of student deaths per year. The importance of having written policies and making institutional decisions before a student death are also addressed. Student affairs professionals and other college and university leaders may use the results of this research to review their own memorial policies and practices and to guide future memorial decisions.

INDEX WORDS: Memorial, student death, college or university, student affairs, higher education, student type, type of death, formal mourning, posthumous degree, family

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B.A., Truman State University, 1994

M.A., Truman State University, 2001

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2023

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May 2023

DEDICATION

To my precious Laura and darling Patrick.

Your deaths shaped my life. Your spirits now lift my heart.

I am eternally grateful to be your sister.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In “The Municipal Gallery Revisited,” William Butler Yeats (1937) penned, “Think where man’s glory most begins and ends, and say my glory was I had such friends.” I am likewise humbled to find myself in the company of the intelligent and interesting individuals who inspired and joined me in my doctoral journey.

My major advisor, Dr. Merrily Dunn, was a consistent source of challenge, support, and encouragement. She was an excellent teacher and mentor, both professionally and personally. From her example, I learned how to live, how to fight, how to rest, and how to extend grace to myself and others. She had unlimited patience and unwavering confidence in me, and I am sincerely grateful for the many times she said, “Kay, you are a smart woman. You should have a doctorate.” I am honored to have this lasting connection with someone I respect so much.

I am thankful for my committee members, whose knowledge, experience, insight, and collaboration improved every aspect of this study. Dr. Diane Cooper served as a member of my committee prior to her retirement; she first suggested a quantitative study to learn more about this topic. Dr. Laura Dean’s challenging questions helped me focus this study and clarify how this research should be used; in addition, she was an expert editor. Dr. Dallin George Young and I began this doctoral program together as students. I am grateful for the opportunity to finish this program with him as a member of my committee. I also greatly appreciated his expertise and assistance with the research methodology and data analysis.

As an individual who has made a chosen family from the most loyal and constant friends in her life, I would also like to express my deep love and appreciation for Father Joseph Bambenek, Jeanene Skoch Golden, Dr. Lou Ann Gilchrist, Rob and Jill Sherwood, Mike and Dr.

Sharon Augustine, Dr. Larry and Dr. Kwan Christenson, Cindy McClanahan, Dr. Erin and Al Weston, Jennifer Hawthorne Smith, and Alicia M. Gregory. I am exceptionally grateful to have "such friends" and to be "Aunt Kay" to many of their children. I am also indebted to my work and church families who helped carry my responsibilities, encouraged me when I struggled, and prayed for my success. I also extend my gratitude to my supervisors, Suzanne Pittman and Joel Robinson, who wholeheartedly supported every stage of my studies.

I distinctly remember the first time I tried on a doctoral robe and tam. I was a silly, young freshman attending a commencement reception, and I had to stand on a nearby garden wall to keep my professor's long, heavy robe from dragging on the ground. I decided that day that I wanted to earn a doctoral degree. My life has taken many different paths since then, and I have studied many different subjects. There has been one constant throughout that quest: a desire to emulate the individuals I respected the most. I cannot complete this dissertation without acknowledging those people who made such a difference in my life as either teachers or colleagues: Dr. Scott Alberts, Dr. Tricia Brown, Dr. Patricia Burton, Dr. David Christensen, Dr. William Cummings, Dr. Adam Davis, Dr. Maria DiStefano, Dr. Barbara Dixon, Dr. Olin Drennen, Dr. Martin Eisenberg, Dr. Ken Farnsworth, Dr. Neil Gilchrist, Dr. David Gillette, Provost Garry Gordon, Dr. Randy Hagerty, Dr. Teresa Heckert, Dr. Dennis Leavens, Dr. Chris Linder, Dr. Jim Lyons, Dr. Jack Magruder, Dean Kathy Rieck, Dr. Dean Van Galen, Dr. Stuart Vorkink, and Dr. Cole Woodcox. I hope that I will always exemplify the love of learning that these teachers nurtured in my mind and in my heart.

Finally, I must acknowledge the incredibly skilled and compassionate staff of Hospice of Northeast Missouri (then Hospice 2000). Several years ago, these helping professionals taught me, a young counseling intern, so much about death, dying, and supporting individuals through one of the most difficult and most sacred experiences in their lives. Their lessons, and those I

learned from the families with whom I worked, changed my life and are reflected in numerous parts of this study.

The words “thank you” are entirely inadequate to express my gratitude. Nevertheless, I offer them to all of these friends from the very bottom my heart.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Although death is a common and predictable pattern in life, few members of a college or university community anticipate dealing with the sudden death of a student (Cintrón et al., 2007). In the contemporary United States, most people believe that they will live until old age (Brabant et al., 2008). Consequently, the abrupt, often unpredictable death of a young adult frequently leads to feelings of shock, dissonance, and unfairness that far exceed the feelings expressed when an older person dies (Brabant et al., 2008; Doss, 2006). While definitions of young adult vary, the nearly two-thirds of college students in the United States who are between the ages of 18-24 certainly fall within this demographic (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSCRC], 2021). Even at age 28, the median age of graduate students in the United States, many would consider death to be premature and unjust (Brabant et al., 2008; NSCRC, 2021).

An internet search for “college student death” instantly results in a list that is “always too long” (Redden, 2007, para 1). The causes of death further illustrate the sudden nature of many deaths in this age group and the fact that it is impossible to predict when, where, or how a student death will occur (Cintrón et al., 2007). During a single month in 2021, media outlets in the United States reported on fourteen college student deaths. Two students living in the same residence hall died from unrelated drug overdoses (Cardine, 2021). Two students in different states died after being diagnosed and hospitalized with COVID-19 (Jaschik, 2021a, 2021b). A young woman found in a parking lot in freezing temperatures later died of hypothermia (Rosario, 2021). A student was shot and killed in a campus parking garage (Jones, 2021), and

another was found dead outside his apartment, the victim of multiple gunshot wounds following a possible road rage incident (Collins, 2021; Hutchinson, 2021). Other deaths were the result of injuries sustained in an on-campus apartment fire (McNeel, 2021), a domestic-related homicide (Stegall, 2021), a hazing incident that led to arrests, convictions, and attempted changes in legislation and another that led to litigation against the university (Hatch, 2022; Kwasnik, 2021, 2022), and three automobile accidents, including a student who was fatally struck by a vehicle after he fell from his skateboard (City News Service, 2021; Omastiak, 2021). Certainly this list is not exhaustive, as numerous individuals die every day without their death attracting media attention, most notably those who die from extended illness or disease.

The media typically identifies individuals as college students when they fall within the 18 to 24-year-old age demographic and are participating in a post-high school, full-time, residential college experience. Based on an estimated annual death rate for college students compiled by both Turner et al. (2013) and Erfle and Dietrich (2020), along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (2021) reported death rate for individuals in this age group, the number of student deaths in 2021 likely ranged between 2,315 and 10,463 students (see also NSCRC, 2021). After students age 25 years or older, who represent roughly one-third of college students, are included in this calculation, the number of student deaths could potentially be as high as 19,000 in one year (CDC, 2021; NSCRC, 2021). As a result, the unfortunate, but unescapable, reality is that many colleges or universities will not complete an academic year without experiencing at least one student death, and larger institutions may experience many, many more.

When a student dies, student affairs administrators often carry the primary responsibility for an institution's response and for the campus policies, processes, and rituals that memorialize the deceased and help the living grieve (Cusick, 2008; Epstein, 2004; Zinner,

1985b). Senior student affairs officers may be called on to communicate with the deceased student's family and with the campus community. The college counseling staff may assist campus community members as they mourn. Hall directors may pack a deceased student's belongings for the family. While these administrators are providing support for the deceased student's family, friends, and other vulnerable members of the campus community, they may also experience grief themselves (Sanger, 2017). "For them this is not just a bad day. This is something that is going to dominate their work and probably their personal lives for weeks and possibly months" (Sanger, 2017, para 30). News of a college student's death may also lead to greater public awareness of student life concerns, such as the prevalence of underage drinking or the consequences of hazing. It may lead to heightened scrutiny of the institution's policies or the actions of its administration and staff, placing even greater stress on the same student affairs professionals who are directly involved in their own and their students' mourning (Redden, 2007; Sanger, 2017).

The intentional and unintentional decisions made in the emotionally charged period following a student death inevitably affect perceptions regarding a deceased student's value and accomplishments (Callahan & Fox, 2008). These decisions send both explicit and implicit messages about how the campus community values certain individuals and groups, as well as any culpability the institution may assume or attempt to avoid for the student's death (Sanger, 2017). Consequently, campuses benefit from having established protocols in place prior to a student's death (Anderson, 2018; Walker, 2016; Zdziarski, 2016). Callahan and Fox (2008) stress that

> most [student affairs professionals] want to believe that their training has prepared them to deal with each situation in a unique and appropriate manner. Although their training may have prepared them to deal with crises, it is in times of crisis that they

> often forget to do that one thing that would have made the response better and stronger because they, too, can get caught up in the emotion of the moment (p. 93).

In current student affairs literature, protocols focus almost exclusively on administrative tasks (Anderson, 2018; Callahan & Fox, 2008; Hamilton, 2008; Streufert, 2004; Swenson & Ginsberg, 1996). They identify who is responsible for specific assignments and the order in which they should be completed (Anderson, 2018; Hamilton, 2008). These plans are often presented as a long to-do list, and they include fairly similar actions, such as designating a single point of contact for the family, notifying the student's instructors and members of the campus community of the death, and closing the student's campus accounts. An internet search using the terms "college student death policy" and "college student death protocol" provides access to dozens of these documents, their uniformity attesting both to the value of the content and to the universality of some acts of closure (see Appendix A for examples).

However, resulting needs often escalate far beyond the scope of these administrative protocols as faculty, staff, and students struggle with an empty desk in the classroom, repeatedly pass a vacant apartment in the residence hall, or recover from interactions with a grief-stricken family (Balk et al., 1993). Because of the way faculty, staff, and students engage with one another in a university community, there are "profound ripple effects" across a college or university campus when a student dies (Levine, 2008, p. 72; Corazzini & May, 1985; Cusick, 2008). And while a great deal is known about grief, mourning, and bereavement, much less is known about how colleges and universities respond to the needs of campus survivors following a student death.

As part of the student death notification process, students associated with the deceased, and sometimes all students, often receive information about additional counseling services that are available in the days immediately following a student death (Anderson, 2018).

That support is particularly critical for college students, who, in addition to acquiring multiple new social and emotional skills, may also be questioning previously held religious and spiritual beliefs (Hai et al., 2018; Lord & Gramling, 2014; Taub & Servaty-Seib, 2008). The college environment can exacerbate these concerns as students find access to coping mechanisms that complicate rather than resolve feelings of grief (Fajgenbaum et al., 2012; Moos & Schaefer, 1986; Taub & Sevaty-Seib, 2008). Very little is known about these interventions with college students, how they impact students' long-term resolution of grief, or if they contribute to student persistence, retention, and graduation (Balk, 2001; Battle et al., 2013). Similarly, very little is known about how secondary or tertiary survivors use these services or how surviving students are affected by the death of someone who was not personally known to them (Hawdon, 2009; Hawdon & Ryan, 2011).

Participating in a memorial that commemorates the life of the deceased is a critical component of mourning and support for surviving members of the institutional community (Callahan & Fox, 2008; Dorney, 2016; Hoy, 2013; Manning, 2000; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998; Streufert, 2004). Memorials help assuage grief, serve as an important act of closure, and give the majority of community members permission to move on (Anderson, 2018; Hoy, 2013; Manning, 2000). Like other non-administrative topics, memorials are seldom addressed in the student affairs literature, although they are a critical component of mourning and support for surviving grievers (Anderson, 2018).

Memorials take many forms. A memorial may be a ceremony, a physical object, or an action (Hoy, 2013). Memorials might be held individually for a single student or jointly for several students who died within a certain time period (Anderson, 2018). Memorial traditions allow the community to work together through the experience of surviving (Doka, 2003; Hoy, 2013). Memorials may also be a place that becomes a lasting or even permanent fixture on a

college campus (Doss, 2006; Foote, 2003). Student death protocols occasionally allude to memorials, but they seldom provide specific details about whether, when, why, how, and for whom they are held. While there are a few colleges and universities, including Texas A&M University and Purdue University, whose memorial traditions have been highlighted in the student affairs literature (see Hamilton, 2008), there is little direction to help an institution without those traditions decide whether or not to sponsor memorials, determine what types of rituals might be right for their community, and explore the various circumstances that could influence their decisions.

I believe that most student affairs professionals share the experience of being approached by a group of students who are part of a deceased student's intimate circle of associations and who are experiencing the off-time death of a classmate for the first time (Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Students may ask for permanent campus markers, naming opportunities, or special ceremonial recognition, not necessarily realizing that there may have been other recent deaths on campus that garnered less attention or that the student's time at the college, while valuable and particularly meaningful to the mourning students, is a relatively short interval in the life span of an institution. Other factors, such as the type of death, may create heightened feelings and a sense of urgency, often with the desire and promise to ensure their classmate and friend is not forgotten (Doss, 2006). Finding a gentle, compassionate response to these requests requires both tact and skill, and having an established, dependable campus tradition or ritual can help steer these students through bereavement that also leads to closure for the institution (Cusick, 2008; Manning, 2000).

Decisions made at these times are fraught with emotional, political, and symbolic meaning, and the resulting list of questions institutions must answer in these situations is a long one. Should every death be treated differently, based on the student and the circumstances?

Should there be a standard way that the school responds any time a student dies? Do all student deaths carry the same weight? Could the response for two students at the same institution look very different and, if so, what does that difference communicate to the campus community? Do some situations, such as those that are particularly traumatic or that attract extensive media attention, merit special consideration and need to be addressed differently than others? And are there factors that might make a decision that is appropriate for one institution completely inappropriate for another?

Understanding the factors that affect these decisions can help student affairs administrators not only critique their policies and processes, but also better identify what messages their memorial practices send to their campus communities. For example, an institution might unintentionally prolong grief for a group of students by choosing not to hold a memorial for a deceased classmate who died by suicide. A university's response to student deaths among its majority population that is disproportionate to its response among other student populations could have social justice implications and indicate that there are equity issues on campus. Similarly, excessive attention given to a well-known or especially involved student's death while little attention is focused on an average student not only highlights equity issues, but it also suggests that some student deaths – and some students – are more important than others.

Considering the unpredictable nature of death and its multiple forms, no protocol can completely detail all the steps an institution might take following a student death. There is no best practice that will meet the needs of every campus or institution type. However, college and university administrators can be prepared to make more informed decisions about memorials for their institutions by considering such possibilities in advance, gaining a deeper understanding

of common college and university memorial practices, and developing comprehensive memorial plans to provide direction when a student dies.

Purpose

This was an introductory, quantitative study to collect descriptive data about institutional decisions to sponsor memorials for deceased college students. In addition to identifying institutional sponsorship practices, common types of memorials, and the reasons institutions do or do not sponsor memorials, I explored how student type and the type of death influenced the likelihood that an institution would sponsor a memorial for a deceased student. I also identified values that are important in institutional sponsorship decisions, and I explored how sponsorship decisions differ by various institutional characteristics. Using an online questionnaire completed by senior student affairs officers at regionally accredited institutions in the United States, this study provides information lacking in the student affairs literature. Student affairs professionals and other college and university leaders may use the results of this research to review their own memorial policies and practices and to guide future memorial decisions.

Research Questions

Because this was an exploratory study without any precedent in prior research, I developed direct, specific research questions around a common theme of learning if, why, and how institutions sponsor memorials for deceased college students. I also included research questions to identify some of the differences and values that might affect institutional memorial decisions and merit further study. Although this list of research questions was longer and more detailed than what is commonly presented in a dissertation, the clarity, structure, and order provided a framework that not only addressed many questions about student memorials that

were yet unanswered, but also provided an effective structure for the subsequent work of questionnaire development, data collection, and data analysis.

These research questions were:

1. How many institutions sponsor memorials for all or some deceased students? How many never sponsor memorials?
2. For institutions that never sponsor memorials for deceased students, what are the reasons they do not sponsor memorials?

For institutions that do sponsor memorials for all or some deceased students:

3. Does the institution have a written policy or practice that describes how the institution memorializes a deceased student?
4. Does the institution memorialize all deceased students in the same manner?
5. What types of memorials do they sponsor?
6. What are the institution's objectives for the memorial?
7. To what extent do variations in student type (e.g., graduate versus undergraduate) or student characteristics (e.g., well-known versus lesser-known) affect the likelihood that an institution will sponsor a memorial for a deceased student? Are some student types or student characteristics more likely to lead to a departure from the institution's established policy or practice than others?
8. To what extent do variations in the type of student's death (e.g., death by suicide, death for which the institution may be liable) affect the likelihood that an institution will sponsor a memorial for a deceased student? Are some types of death more likely to lead to a departure from the institution's established policy or practice than others?

9. How important are certain values (e.g., respecting the family's wishes or requests, maintaining uniformity) when institutions sponsor a memorial for a deceased student?
10. Are there other findings from this data that provide insight into institutional decisions to sponsor memorials for deceased students?

And, for each of these questions:

11. Are there differences in frequencies or significant differences between groups based on basic Carnegie classification, size, control, religious affiliation, number of student deaths per year, written memorial policy or practice, or memorial consistency that provide additional insight into memorial practices?

Definitions

Administrative or support functions: tasks and processes to address the administrative, financial, personnel, and public relations issues that emerge in the immediate aftermath of a student death (Cusick, 2008; Streufert, 2004). These tasks could include sending notifications to the campus community, collecting the deceased's belongings, or closing their accounts (Callahan & Fox, 2008; Walker, 2016; Streufert, 2004).

Bereavement: the process or time in which an individual is actively grieving.

Campus: the place or places – both physical and virtual – that a college or university owns and within which individuals and groups are subject to that institution's policies.

Communal bereavement: the experience of grief and distress felt among people who did not know and possibly never met the deceased (Hawdon, 2009). Grief and distress extend beyond the deceased's social network to the larger community.

Formal mourning: intentional, planned, public expressions of mourning following the death of an individual or individuals (Anderson, 2018)

Grief: “a process of having to let go, of adapting to an environment without the object of loss. It commonly consists of, but is not limited to, shock, anger, guilt, fear, depression, reconstruction, and hope … it is replete with anxiety and various emotional and physical reactions” (LaGrand, 1985, p. 17). Grief differs from mourning in that it is rooted in personal feelings, not behavior.

Informal mourning: often referred to as “mass acts of condolence,” spontaneous expressions of mourning at “symbolically important locations,” including acts such as leaving notes, stuffed animals, or flowers at a death site or an impromptu gathering of mourners (Hawdon, 2009, pp. 724-5).

Institution-sponsored: an object or event that is coordinated, organized, facilitated, or funded by the institutional or an institutional department.

Memorial: a ceremony, event, object, program, or place that commemorates the life of a deceased individual. A body is typically not present at a memorial (O’Rourke et al., 2011).

Mourning: the outward behaviors, rituals, ceremonies, traditions, or rites that allow an individual to acknowledge and create meaning about the life of an individual who has died (Balk, 2011; Frew & Forsdike, 2022; Jacobsen & Petersen, 2019). Mourning differs from grief in that it is rooted in behavior, not personal feelings.

Postvention: a series of intentional and therapeutic interventions for survivors following a critical incident, including but not limited to critical incident stress debriefing or counseling (Levine, 2008).

Senior student affairs officer: the highest-ranked administrator responsible for the overall direction of student support programs and services at a higher education institution. Common titles for this position include vice president for student affairs, vice president for student services, dean of students, and chief student affairs officer, although diversity activists and experts have advocated removing the word “chief” from job titles due to the significance of this

word in Native and Indigenous cultures (Bohanon, 2022). In some cases, the senior student affairs officer may be an assistant or associate vice president who reports to the university provost.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section begins with a short overview of some of the most significant work in the extensive field of grief, mourning, and bereavement research, compared to the relative absence of this topic in the student affairs literature. After discussing the extent and potential impact of student death, I will address the responsibility senior student affairs professionals often have to lead during these crises. I will then outline how responses to student deaths have appeared in the student affairs literature in three general stages: developing and following administrative best practices, providing student and institutional community support, and facilitating or sponsoring memorials. Memorials will be discussed in additional detail, focusing on their role in the mourning and bereavement process and on the multiple factors that can affect whether or not a campus holds a memorial following a student death. Throughout this review, examples from various colleges and universities will be included to illustrate existing practices.

Unfortunately, the majority of literature collected on this topic is older and was predominately published as best practice documents or commentary. To date, there has been no attempt to collect information across institutions that describes if and how student memorials are held on college campuses. Therefore, the sections of this literature review are built to indicate the need for a better understanding of these memorial practices and the factors that affect them.

Grief, Mourning, and Bereavement Research

Most work on student death and supporting grieving college students does not come from the student affairs literature, but from research in counseling, psychology, sociology, and

death studies. Countless works and articles discuss the tasks of grief, mourning, and bereavement. Rahe et al. (1967) found that losing a loved one is one of the most stressful and life-changing events that individuals can experience, a finding that is consistent across gender, age, and time. Kübler-Ross (1969) first identified and described five stages of grief. Parks (1972) discussed how unresolved grief is problematic for both individuals and groups, and Bowlby (1980) later outlined four phases of bereavement recovery. Much less attention has been given to secondary and tertiary survivors (Zinner, 1985b), although Hawdon (2009) described how deaths, particularly through tragedy, not only produce grieving individuals, but also grieving communities. Although a comprehensive review of the literature on grief, mourning, and bereavement is beyond the scope of this paper, this research confirms that the loss of a loved one, a friend, or even an acquaintance, may trigger a challenging and complex transition period that, with appropriate support, tends to resolve itself within six months to one year (Balk, 2008).

Research on college student bereavement consistently focuses on students who are dealing with the death of a family member or loved one, most often a grandparent (Balk & Vesta, 1998; Cusick, 2008; McCusker & Witherow, 2012; Zinner, 1985b). Although bereavement is not uncommon among college students, few interventions have been empirically evaluated for use with this population, who are often "first-time grievers" (Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014, p. 5; Balk, 2001; Battle et al., 2013). Only one paper has tied mourning to student development theory (Taub & Sevaty-Seib, 2008), and no studies have focused specifically on the death of a classmate or on the collective grief of a campus community that has lost a student (Hawdon, 2009; Hawdon & Ryan, 2011). Unfortunately, this lack of information on how students grieve following the traditionally off-time death of a classmate, as well as a lack of research on appropriate interventions, leaves student affairs professionals with minimal direction when trying to identify the best way to respond to such tragedies. However, we can use research from

grief studies to guide work with campus populations, confidently extending evidence that certain practices provide helpful, healing interventions for most grieving individuals.

Extent and Impact of Student Deaths

"Sad as it is, a truth of the matter is that as long as there have been students, there have been student deaths" (Redden, 2007, para. 3). While no national database tracks the number of college students who die each year, three publications have attempted to systematically quantify the number or type of student deaths at higher education institutions in the United States. The first was conducted over 80 years ago, at which time tuberculous and pneumonia accounted for the deaths of 13.7% of college students in surveyed institutions (Diehl & Shepard, 1939). Turner et al. (2013) attempted to collect more specific data on student deaths using a convenience sample of 157 self-selected institutions. Focusing only on students who were between the ages of 18 and 24, they calculated a rate of 22.4 deaths per 100,000 students, a rate lower than the CDC reported for members for all members of the same age demographic. Accidental injuries, primarily alcohol related, were responsible for the greatest number of causalities, followed by suicide (Hingson et al., 2009; Turner et al., 2013). Further, while half of the institutions they surveyed reported no student deaths in the survey year, the remaining colleges and universities reported between 1 and 19 deaths (Turner et al., 2013). Erfle and Dietrich (2020) later used insurance data to determine that students were less likely to die while participating in a study abroad program. At the same time, they confirmed an overall mortality rate for students between the ages of 18 and 24 at 22.4 deaths per 100,000 college students per year, exactly matching Turner et al.'s (2013) earlier finding.

Using Fall 2021 enrollment and Turner et al.'s (2013) and Erfle and Dietrich's (2020) death rate calculations, up to 2,315 students aged 18 to 24 died during the 2021-2022 academic year (NSCRC, 2021). However, this rate is far lower than the 101.3 deaths per 100,000

individuals that the CDC (2021) reports for this age group, indicating that the number of college student deaths could have been as high as 10,463. This estimate also does not include deaths among the roughly one-third of college students who are 25 years old or older, a group of nearly 6 million students that includes many graduate students and adult learners, whose mortality rate increases with each year of age (CDC, 2021). Therefore, the actual count of student deaths is likely much higher, with a possibility that up to 19,000 college students attending any of the almost 4,000 institutions of higher education in the United States may have died in the last year (CDC, 2021; NSCRC, 2021; Turner et al., 2013). The ultimate implication of this data is that while some colleges and universities may be spared the trauma of a student death, at least half of the institutions of higher education in the United States will experience multiple student deaths in an academic year.

Role of Student Affairs Professionals

Due to training in counseling and emergency management, immediacy to students, and responsibility for students' out-of-class activities, student affairs professionals are often the first university officials involved when a student dies (Cusick, 2008; Epstein, 2004; Sanger, 2017; Zinner, 1985b). These staff members are also the ones who generally bear the greatest burden for campus response and for facilitating formal mourning following a student death (Sanger, 2017).

Many of these responsibilities require student affairs professionals to balance competing interests. For example, some institutions choose to share information with the entire campus community each time a student death occurs, while others limit disclosure to the student's kinship groups to limit the likelihood that they will overwhelm community members when numerous deaths occur each year (Anderson, 2018; Brennan, 2019). Institutions may struggle to balance transparency and the deceased student's family's right to privacy and desire

to control disclosure about the death (Brennan, 2019). In our current electronic, information-saturated environment, disseminating accurate and appropriate communication about a student's death in a timely but responsible manner can be particularly difficult for student affairs professionals, particularly once news and rumors begin circulating on social media and other online outlets (Anderson, 2018; Levine, 2008; Pennington, 2013). Further, when the institution may be at risk as a result of the student death, student affairs professionals may be instructed not to act as the institution negotiates legal liability and unpopular media attention (Anderson, 2018), even when their training indicates that other action is preferable.

Student affairs professionals are typically responsible for facilitating formal mourning in their campus communities. Formal mourning encompasses an institution's policy on student deaths and specific, intentional, institutional, public actions and events (Anderson, 2018). Formal mourning includes activities that are officially endorsed by the institution that are compassionate and coordinated, but that are also clearly focused on closing the university-student relationship (Anderson, 2018; Cusick, 2018). The task of facilitating formal mourning takes into account the student development consequences of a peer's death, as well as the overall effect the death has on the campus community (Taub & Servaty-Seib, 2008).

Formal mourning differs from informal mourning in the intentionality and spontaneity of expressions that occur after the death of a student. Acts of informal mourning include placing flowers or stuffed animals at the student's death site or posting messages on the deceased student's social media page (Doss, 2006; Pennington, 2013). When unofficial and spontaneous memorials begin, determining when they have outlived their utility is particularly complex (Doss, 2016). An institution rarely has control over these responses from grievers, but it can intervene and interrupt these reactions by replacing them with formal and predictable traditions, rituals, and memorials (Manning, 2000).

Responding to Student Deaths

A student affairs professional's response to student deaths generally has three components: developing and following administrative best practices, providing student and institutional community support, and facilitating or sponsoring memorials (Anderson, 2018). These responsibilities have appeared in the literature in roughly chronological order, with the longest period of attention given to various administrative best practices, less attention to student and institutional community support, and relatively little focus on memorials.

Developing and Following Administrative Best Practices

As bureaucratic institutions, the administrative, financial, personnel, and public relations issues that emerge from a student death are extensive and are often the institution's primary focus (Cusick, 2008). Journals began to publish best practices for responding to student deaths in the 1980s, prompted primarily by a 1978 public broadcasting documentary about suicide on college campuses (Brown, 2014; Knott & Crafts, 1980; McCusker & Witherow, 2012). Then, in 1985, *New Directions for Student Services* published an issue focused on coping with death on campus (Zinner, 1985a) that made the first significant contribution to the literature and became the "classic sourcebook" on dealing with student deaths (Steufert, 2004, p. 166; Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2008a). One year later, in 1986, a one-page article in the *Journal of Counseling and Development* outlined necessary steps for administrators to take in response to a student death (Halberg, 1986); it included only one reference, again demonstrating the general dearth of direction and assistance available to student affairs personnel at that time. For years, the literature continued to focus primarily on the most immediate administrative tasks following the death of a student (Rickgarn, 1987; Stephenson, 1985), and even these best practice articles were often minimalistic.

More detailed models began to appear in the literature in the early 1990s (Scott et al., 1992; Swenson & Ginsberg, 1996). Not coincidentally, by that point, most colleges and universities had established on-campus counseling services for their students (Kraft, 2011). While acknowledging that "each death is different, and each death is going to present its own unique problems" (Stephenson, 1985, p. 11), these newer plans served a critical purpose in identifying and establishing more comprehensive task lists that institutions needed to address in the immediate aftermath of a student death (Cusick, 2008; Streufert, 2004). Some of the most common recommendations included identifying a campus coordinator to work with the family, the campus, and the public; notifying appropriate individuals and offices to close student's records; and identifying and notifying same-name students and their families (Callahan & Fox, 2008; Cusick, 2008; Hamilton, 2008; Streufert, 2004). In addition, campuses were encouraged to answer some of the most pressing questions related to student deaths in advance of such an occurrence, such as notifications to campus, financial refunds, collection of the deceased's belongings, and the awarding of posthumous degrees (Anderson, 2018; Callahan & Fox, 2008; Walker, 2016; Streufert, 2004).

Within a larger context for formal mourning, McKusker and Witherow (2012) reported that "our only rituals were administrative ones" until a particularly significant student death on their campus changed the way their institution responded when a student dies (p. 15). An internet search identifies many examples of how colleges and universities are now administratively prepared for this eventuality (Callahan & Fox, 2008; see also Appendix A). However, most of these processes and rituals still focus primarily on administrative actions that directly affect the deceased student's family, not on assisting the members of the university community that survive (McKusker & Witherow, 2012; Zinner, 1985b), indicating the need for the two other formal mourning processes.

Providing Student and Institutional Community Support

As more best practice research became available, many colleges and universities began to form death response teams (DRTs) (McCauley & Powell, 2007; Rickgarn, 1987, 1994). These teams were originally convened to address administrative, logistic, resource, and policy processes, because "a grieving family should not have to contend with bureaucratic red tape" (Callahan & Fox, 2008, p. 93; Cusick, 2008). Since then, the use of death response teams (DRTs) has been an effective measure on many campuses to provide support strategies following a student death (McCauley & Powell, 2007; Rickgarn, 1987, 1994; Streufert, 2004). DRTs are comprised of individuals who have the expertise to provide support to survivors as a result of their professional training or position. Their responsibilities include not only providing "psychological first aid" following a student death, but also providing community postvention and information related to the grief and mourning (Streufert, 2004, pp. 168-9). Not surprisingly, the majority of members of a DRT would traditionally be housed within student affairs departments (McCauley & Powell, 2007; Rickgarn, 1987, 1994; Streufert, 2004).

Survivors' grief, mourning, and bereavement were not addressed specifically in the student services literature for several more years (Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2008a). Until 2008, none of the student affairs literature addressed mourning from a student development perspective, even though bereaved students often struggle in areas that are central to the college experience (Meshot & Leitner, 1994; Sevaty-Seib & Hamilton, 2006; Sevaty-Seib & Taub, 2008a). That changed when a follow-up edition of *New Directions for Student Services* included an article that integrated existing research on bereavement with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) student development theory and Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition theory (Taub & Servaty-Seib, 2008).

Focusing primarily on Chickering and Reisser's (1993) achieving intellectual competence, developing interpersonal competence, managing emotions, achieving emotional independence, and achieving instrumental independence vectors, Taub and Servaty-Seib (2008) provided several examples of how bereavement can affect these developmental tasks. For instance, bereaved students may experience a decline in academic performance, particularly during the term in which the loss occurs (Meshot & Leitner, 1994; Servaty-Seib & Hamilton, 2006; Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2008b). Students who are actively working on achieving intellectual competence may not have developed the skills or strategies to allow them to focus on coursework while simultaneously managing the emotions of grief. Students learning how to develop interpersonal competence may lack the skills to ask for help or to assist other students who are grieving. These students may also cling to or withdraw from relationships, overwhelmed by a perceived betrayal of trust and intimacy. The inability to fully manage one's emotions complicates common feelings associated with bereavement, including depression, emptiness, anger, loneliness, guilt, and fear (Balk, 1997; LaGrand, 1985; Sklar & Harley, 1990). In addition, students who are struggling to master emotional independence may falsely assume that they do not need help dealing with a significant loss when they actually do (Balk et al., 2010). Students who have not achieved instrumental independence may not be able to carry out tasks or solve problems independently, particularly if the person who died was a person on whose assistance they depended. Finally, students often turn to religion to make meaning of a loss (Hai et al., 2018; Lord & Gramling, 2014; Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002; Neimeyer et al., 2008), and this can also have important implications for students developing integrity. Students who have not developed a general purpose in life experience higher grief intensity and more intrusive symptoms of grief (Taub & Sevaty-Seib, 2008).

Applying Schlossberg's transition theory, a significant death may create an additional transition process for a student (Cox et al., 2016; Taub & Sevaty-Seib, 2008). "A transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5). The consequences of a specific transition vary depending on the transition-triggering event (situation), the characteristics of the individual experiencing the event (self), the type and amount of support available to the individual, and the strategies one uses to work through the transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Schlossberg et al. (1995) also differentiate between "on time" and "off time" transitions. "On time" transitions are those that occur at an expected, predictable time; "off time" occurrences are non-normative and unanticipated events and can create significant distress for the individual (Balk, 2011; Balk et al. 1993; Battle et al., 2013; Cox et al., 2016). Many student deaths are examples of "off time" transitions.

Borzumato-Gainey and Noyes (2014) further found that grief is such a significant transition for college students because many students are "first-time grievers" (p. 50; Dorney, 2016). College students are not necessarily strangers to bereavement. An estimated 22-30% of college students are within the first year of mourning the death of a family member or loved one (Balk, 2001, 2008; Balk et al., 2010; LeGrand, 1985, 1987), and 49% of undergraduates were within 2 years of a death experience (Cousins et al., 2017; Hardison et al., 2005). However, most of these deaths involve the loss of grandparents or other relatives which, while significant, are traditionally on-time transitions (Balk, 1997; Schlossberg, 1981). The off-time death of a classmate tends to be the first opportunity for a student to experience significant unanticipated grief (Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014).

The unique factors of the college environment can also affect grief and shape the context in which mourning occurs (Fajgenbaum et al., 2012; Moos & Schaefer, 1986; Taub & Sevaty-Seib, 2008). These factors include geographic distance from home and students' usual support systems, the traditional carefree social life expected by college students, and a college's limited resources for grief support (Balk et al., 1993; Fajgenbaum et al., 2012; LeGrand, 1985, 1987). Students who are predominately from out of state need greater support than students who live locally and who can rely on established support systems (Balk & Vesta 1998; Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014; Janowiak et al., 1995). Heavy partying, substance use and abuse, and sexual promiscuity are all coping strategies that are counter to a grieving student's best interests (Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014). Students often turn to their roommates and friends for support in the grieving process, but their non-grieving peers often lack the skills and knowledge to provide adequate comfort and support (Balk, 1997, 2001; Balk et al., 1993; Cox et al., 2015; Matthews & Sevaty-Seib, 2007; Tedrick Parikh & Servaty-Seib, 2013). Depending on the size or location of the campus, students may lack access to private or quiet places to reflect, journal, and process their emotions (Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014). Without access to the physical and emotional space and support to safely grieve, some students may pass into unresolved or prolonged grief (Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014; Fajgenbaum et al., 2012).

Responding to a student death in both "caring and rational ways" typically requires the use of broad mourning plans (Callahan & Fox, 2008, p. 87). In addition, because grief can have such a profound effect on retention and graduation, "it would seem only rational for universities to develop and implement effective interventions to assist bereaved students" (Balk, 2001, p. 73). Arriving at a consensus about how to meet these needs, however, proves to be much more difficult than assembling the administrative action plans or death response teams that exist at most universities (Balk, 2011). Published student affairs research focuses very little on support

strategies, other than making counseling available, to address student bereavement and grief (Cusick, 2008; Zinner, 1985b). Redden (2007) describes how the University of California Merced, founded in 2005, experienced its first student death two years later. Their vice chancellor of student affairs explained that, while they followed their procedures, “we're here to take care of students' emotional well-being. That's a big part of the process that isn't necessarily written down in protocols” (Redden, 2007, para 10).

In the past, the higher education community has been criticized for dismissing the serious and continuing impact of bereavement on young adults (LaGrand, 1987), particularly those with only secondary or tertiary associations with the deceased (Zinner, 1985b). As universities attempt to “bring the relationship with deceased students to a dignified close” (Cusick, 2008, p. 551), they must also respond to the emotional needs of the campus (Zinner, 1985b). If colleges and universities are truly committed to promoting the well-being of all their students and fostering their success, they must attend to the needs of these surviving classmates (Balk, 2001, 2008; Zinner, 1985b).

Not everyone impacted by a student death experiences personal grief that is centered in their relationship with the deceased (Hawdon, 2009; Hawdon & Ryan, 2011). Death – and particularly tragic death – within a community produces not only grieving individuals, but also grieving communities (Hawdon, 2009). Hawdon (2009) used the term “communal bereavement” to explain the widespread experience of grief and distress felt among people who did not have a direct social tie with and may not have even known the deceased, but who were nonetheless impacted by their death. These individuals can feel confused about how to behave and what to feel when such a death occurs (see Jones, 2007, as cited in Ryan & Hawdon, 2008).

While individual therapeutic approaches may be most effective for primary survivors, they may not be the best approach for the remainder of the institutional community (Hawdon &

Ryan, 2011). Grief counselors, in particular, should recognize the difference between individual and community grief and ensure that counseling and therapeutic interventions do not interfere with the larger community's need to resolve grief more quickly and move forward with their regular events and activities (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011). In addition, campus responses should not be so overwhelming that students who continue to function normally feel guilty or that students feel pressured to engage in performative grieving (Sanger, 2017).

"To view grief solely through a psychological paradigm ignores the healing power of community solidarity" (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011, p. 1378). Communal grief is most often addressed through mass gatherings, vigils, memorial services, or mass acts of condolence (Frew & Forsdike, 2022; Hawdon, 2009). Communal grief does not need to necessarily be therapeutic, because the shared nature of communal grief in and of itself can be healing (Durkheim, 1964, as cited in Hawdon & Ryan, 2011). The resulting solidarity from communal grief is a likely "source of healing for many people" (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011, p. 1378).

Facilitating or Sponsoring Memorials

When a student dies, attendance at his or her funeral may not be an option for surviving students or, particularly, communal grievers. In contrast, memorials – which serve many of the same purposes as a funeral but which do not include a presentation of the deceased's body – can be conducted anywhere and in multiple forms (O'Rourke et al., 2011). A memorial may be a ceremony, a physical object, or an action (Hoy, 2013). Common traditions and rites include holding a memorial service (Streufert, 2004), creating a scholarship program (Zinner, 1985b), lowering campus flags to half-mast (Siegel, 1994), or sending video or handwritten messages to the family (Wrenn, 1999). Memorials may also be a place (Foote, 2003). Memorials may include recognition at commencement or other formal ceremony or the presentation of a posthumous degree or certificate of attendance (Anderson, 2018). Memorials might be held individually for a

single student or jointly for several students who died within a specific time period. A memorial is part of an institution's formal mourning response acts if the institution coordinates, organizes, facilitates, sponsors, or funds a memorial (Anderson, 2018).

While memorials are an important component of formal mourning, they are rarely addressed in death response plans or in the student affairs literature. What literature exists related to memorials at colleges and universities is mixed in terms of determining when and how to have a memorial service. Callahan and Fox (2008) recommend that the university provides assistance when either the family or students express the desire for a memorial service. Dorney (2016) also suggests that institutions facilitate memorial services, fundraising activities, and other memorials when requested by students. Several other administrative response plans include making a decision about whether to offer a service, but provide no directions for doing so (Callahan & Fox, 2008).

The Purpose of Memorials

In the United States, there are generally accepted traditions and social norms that are anticipated after an individual's death (Balk, 2001; Frew & Forsdike, 2022). These include a religious service or a celebration of the decedent's life, an opportunity to provide condolences to surviving family members or friends, and disposal of the body through donation, embalming, cremation, and/or burial (Davidson & Dolka, 1999). They also commonly involve some form of memorial, whether through a ceremony, a donation, a marker at a gravesite, or other indicator that not only honors the individual's life, but also acknowledges their death (Foote, 2003; Hoy, 2013; O'Rourke et al., 2011). These traditions are usually tied to the place where the individual or their family lived or to the deceased's religious customs and beliefs (Davidson & Dolka, 1999; Foote, 2003). Often reflecting Judeo-Christian teachings and values, they emphasize the

importance of a well-lived life, continued existence of the spirit after death, or the preservation of relationships in the afterlife (Davidson & Dolka, 1999).

These "public memorials are collective events" that often focus on communal grief (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011, p. 1367; Frew & Forsdike, 2022; Hawdon, 2009). Memorials are an important means of achieving closure following a death, and thus an important means of providing support for the institutional community (Hoy, 2013). Manning (2000) refers to these activities as "rituals of healing" (p. 7). When institutions fail to "partake of the healing qualities of healing rituals, the pain lingers longer than it should and interferes with community members' ability to return to their regular routine" (Manning, 2000, p. 7). These rituals also "play a central role in the cultural work of human meaning making" (Manning, 2000, p. 2). Memorials serve as an anchor in times of uncertainty, help grievers acknowledge loss, give individuals permission to grieve, gather community, recognize the deceased as a valued member of the community, and create a permanent remembrance of the deceased.

Acting as Anchors

For memorials to be effective, McCusker and Witherow (2012) conclude that the ritual must be an established and predictable one on the college campus. Such expected rituals act as "anchors" when students feel most vulnerable (McCusker & Witherow, 2012, p. 17). They provide a sense of order, stability, and security in the immediate period of time following a death (Hoy, 2013; Kollar, 1990; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998; Turner, 1969). Some have posited that a lack of this type of ritual after a significant death contributes to complications in the resolution of grief (Doka, 2002; Hoy, 2013; Rando, 1993; Worden, 2009). At Appalachian State University, "the protocol allows for consistency when the campus needs it. … No matter the circumstance, we respond by doing the same things every time, no matter what" (Brennen, 2019, para 19).

Acknowledging the Loss

All survivors – both intimate and communal – have a right to be acknowledged and recognized as having suffered a significant loss, to be informed of the facts of the death, and to be allowed to participate in rituals or ceremonies that promote closure (Zinner, 1985b). One of the primary tasks that a memorial service accomplishes is acknowledging this loss (Corazzini & May, 1985). This includes concretely stating its permanence, as "it is productive to state clearly what the mourner will never see again" (Corazzini & May, 1985, p. 42). Perry (1981) similarly found that "when a sense of loss is accorded the honor of acknowledgment, movement is more rapid and the risk of getting stuck in apathy, alienation, or depression is reduced" (p. 108).

Giving Permission to Grieve

At the same time they facilitate these rituals and services, student affairs professionals must also acknowledge that everyone grieves differently and that the community needs time to grieve in its own way (Zdziarski, 2016). A memorial gives students and community members permission to grieve and encourages expressions of mourning (Balk, 2011; Bazan, 2016). A memorial, "if it is done well, can be an important adjunct in aiding and abetting the healthy resolution of grief" (Worden, 2009, p. 118). While reflecting on the recent death of a college student on his campus, Bazan (2016) wrote about his institution's memorial ritual, which included a campus religious service, and noted that "our liturgy didn't take away the hurt, but it gave us a safe space to hurt. It didn't bring our dead classmate back to life, but it honored the life he had— and his life to come" (p. 14).

Attendees at a memorial service are likely to see the ritual as an opportunity for personal coping or managing the emotional and psychological experience of bereavement (O'Rourke et al., 2011). Although some traditions involve positive emotions and actions, including humor, jokes, and storytelling, most rituals are designed in part to permit the relatively

public manifestation of sorrow that might otherwise be inappropriate in everyday interactions (Doka, 2003; O'Rourke et al, 2011). It is common during such mass gatherings for survivors to express their grief openly by crying, holding somber moments of silence, speaking only in reverent tones, or singing emotion-laden songs (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011). Evidence suggests that students, especially males who shy away from support groups and professional counseling, have found that participation in memorial services reduced feelings of helplessness and were a preferred therapeutic outlet for their grief (Fagjenbaum et al., 2012; Halberg, 1986; O'Rourke et al., 2011).

These rituals also provide an opportunity to share information about the grieving process and about what kind of institutional support is available (Balk, 2011). Student affairs professionals can teach mourners what to expect as they work through the grieving process. They also mobilize mourners to help in concrete and specific ways. Considering that college students are often "first-time grievers," this assistance can be invaluable in helping the survivor understand the effects of grief and what to expect as they heal (Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014, p. 50).

Gathering Community

A memorial service or funeral can be a place to express and receive social support. Part of a service is oriented to connecting mourners with other individuals connected to the deceased, as well as to provide emotional support for survivors (O'Rourke et al., 2011). These services combat social isolation by helping the grieving individual see that they are not the only one experiencing grief and that they are not alone (Bazan, 2016; Collins, 2004; Doka, 2003). A service also communicates to survivors that they are cared for and loved (Hoy, 2013). These tasks bring students together as part of a community, which scholars agree is essential for

grieving students (Bazan, 2016; Hoy, 2013; McCusker & Witherow, 2012; Ryan & Hawdon, 2008; Zinner, 1985b).

This "gathered community" is an especially important part of helping community members work through the experience of surviving (Hoy, 2013, p. 47; Doka, 2003; Haydon & Ryan, 2011). Balk (2011) asserts that providing safe places like this for conversations to occur is the intervention that mourners find most helpful. What is surprising is that the effect of participating in this public ritual remains significant even a year after the tragedy (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011).

Because memorials are often group experiences, they also represent a social context in which relationships can be established, renewed, and otherwise managed (Hoy, 2013; O'Rourke et al., 2011). They also reaffirm that the community remains intact despite the recent trauma (Eyre, 2007; Turkel, 2002). This supports the work of Erikson (1976, as cited in Ryan & Hawdon, 2008), who found that the severing of community ties following a tragedy was most detrimental to the survivors and that re-establishing those ties was the most important way to regain a sense of normalcy. They also enhance the group's sense of pride, resolve, togetherness, and unity by fostering short-term elevated levels of solidarity (Doka, 2003; Eyre, 2007; Hawdon & Ryan, 2011).

Recognizing the Deceased as a Valued Member of the Community

"The verbal and nonverbal actions of student affairs professionals have the power to communicate that the student's life had meaning and that the deceased was an important member of the institutional community" (Hamilton, 2008, p. 82). Colleges and universities are generally quick to publicly acknowledge the victims of national tragedies like the plane crash that killed several members of the Marshall University football team, the Texas A&M bonfire collapse that killed 12 students, and Virginia Tech shooting in which 32 individuals died, even

when these incidents do not take place on their own campuses (McCusker & Witherow, 2012). Higher education institutions must be equally invested in acknowledging an individual student's death on their own campus (McCusker & Witherow, 2012).

Public expressions, such as a memorial service, show that the deceased was a valued member of the campus community (Hamilton, 2008). They tap not only into survivors' desire to ensure that their classmate is not forgotten, but also into the primal need to know that they, too, would be celebrated and missed if they died (Bazan, 2016). Joyce (2001) explained that these ceremonies "inscribed the dead into social memory" (p. 12). For example, Appalachian State University describes how they "choose to define our students by the unique contributions each person brings to our community. We believe each member of our community should be remembered for the contributions they made in life" (n.d., p. 9).

Having supportive people who are willing and open to talking about the deceased and what that individual meant to the mourners is also essential (Balk, 2011). The process of reviewing the relationship provokes feelings that help the individual resolve grief (Bazan, 2016). Whether those recollections include the first or the last meeting with the deceased or particular times of joy or sadness, they should be encouraged and stimulated (Corazini & May, 1985). Such memories give the bereaved an opportunity to identify and accept the loss by talking about the deceased and the role that the individual played in the mourner's life. As a result, storytelling is an important part of these rituals (Balk, 1997; Bazan, 2016). Stories of the past help create meaning for the present as students ask questions like "what did I learn from Joey's life? How am I changed because of him?" (Bazan, 2016, p. 14). Only after considering the past and the present can grievers begin to look toward the future (Bazan, 2016).

Creating a Permanent Remembrance for the Deceased

Many of the objectives included in the preceding sections specifically address memorials as ceremony or ritual. However, some memorials also serve a unique purpose in creating a permanent remembrance, often a physical location, that is associated with the deceased. The most common permanent remembrance object in the United States is the tombstone, which indicates where the deceased is buried and serves as a gathering place that is primarily used by the deceased's family (O'Rourke et al., 2011). When a student dies, the deceased's family or peers may request permanent remembrances on campus that are associated with the places the student lived, studied, worked, or enjoyed. These types of memorials may include acts such as creating a separate physical space dedicated to the deceased; naming a public space in the deceased's memory; placing a bench, plaque, or marker in a place the deceased particularly enjoyed; or planting a tree or garden.

The United States Department of Education's Emergency Response and Crisis Management Center warns schools to "consider carefully the decision to create permanent, physical memorials to deceased students," further explaining that "in many cases, an alternative memorial activity is preferable to a permanent, fixed memorial" (Paine, 2007, p. 1). While useful in addressing short-term grief issues, permanent memorials pose significant long-term issues associated with planning, maintenance, and equity. As a result, administrators and campus planners need to consider a number of difficult questions before approving such requests. For instance, what happens when a memorial bench at a deceased student's favorite spot on campus needs to be moved to facilitate new campus construction? What happens when the tree planted to memorialize a student dies and needs to be removed? How long does such a memorial remain in place, and will it still be a significant symbol in ten or twenty years, once the deceased student's peers have left the institution (Paine, 2007)? How does an institution

respond if that space is vandalized? If a location is named in memory of a deceased student, what happens when that facility is significantly remodeled or torn down? How do institutions monitor these types of memorials and ensure that all students are recognized equally? Do certain situations require a permanent memorial? And, in the case of an institution with a high number of student deaths, how many individualized, permanent memorials can an institution support over time?

Some campuses seek to remove some of these obstacles by creating a single place and manner in which deceased students are remembered on the physical college campus (Anderson, 2018). Memory walls, plaques, engraved bricks placed in a campus plaza, or a significant campus symbol may all serve this purpose. For example, on the campus of Kennesaw State University in northern Georgia, a sculpture of the school's mascot titled "Midnight Watch" depicts an owl pensively keeping watch over her nest. Annual memorial services are held at this statue to create the permanent association between the sculpture and a memorial for the deceased (Boone, 2009). Another common institutional practice is to build permanent memorials in recognition of a specific set of students, particularly students or former students who died while serving in the United States military. In 2015, Gordon State College in Barnesville, Georgia, erected a memorial that lists the names of students and former students who lost their lives during military service since World War I (Gordon State College, 2022). Founded in 1889, two and a half decades after the end of the Civil War, Gordon State was able to avoid the controversy that such memorials have spurred in other areas of the South where recognition of students who participated in the Civil War creates its own set of challenges. For instance, until 2020, the University of Alabama had a controversial granite marker on its campus quadrangle that honored those who fought as confederate soldiers (University of Alabama Libraries, 2022). The University of Georgia addressed these issues by dedicating their memorial garden and book

of remembrance in 2005 as an “apolitical” memorial, “going beyond issues of whether any particular war was good or bad” (Carlyle, 2005, para. 2); Georgia’s memorial includes individuals who died in the Indian Wars, which began in the 1830s, and the Civil War.

A related trend at colleges and universities is the establishment of a permanent memorial to honor a significant campus tragedy that results in multiple community deaths, demonstrating that the trauma of some deaths and events requires additional acknowledgement. Foote (2003) cites this type of memorial building as a relatively recent desire and development, as historic tragic events have often gone decades without physical acknowledgement as institutions attempted to distance themselves from the shame that such an incident occurred on their campuses. For instance, a memorial for the victims of the University of Texas clock tower shooting in 1966 was not erected until forty years after the tragedy (Carlson, 2007; Foote, 2003), and it was ten additional years later, on the 50th anniversary of the shooting, before a monument listing the names of the victims was placed and dedicated on campus (Jarvis, 2016). Similarly, a year after the Ohio National Guard shot and killed four students during war protests at Kent State University on May 4, 1970, students initiated the tradition of holding an annual commemoration ceremony. However, Kent State did not dedicate any sort of physical memorial to the victims until 1990 (Carlson, 2007; Foote, 2003), and it waited an additional twenty years before dedicating a memorial identifying each of the four students who were killed (Kent State University, 2022).

Just 11 days later on the campus of Jackson State College in Mississippi, a college junior and a high school senior were killed and 12 students were injured when city police fired into a crowd at a site of frequent racial tension. Although this event at a historically black institution went largely unnoticed nationally, the institution and community more quickly memorialized the incident by creating a pedestrian place at the site of the riot, which was named after the two

students who died. In addition, the bullet marks in the side of the nearest academic building were left untouched as a visible reminder of that day (Jackson State University, 2022).

Nationally, the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995 was the beginning of the general public's desire – even eagerness – to immediately and meaningfully memorialize tragedies (Foote, 2003). On college campuses, this manifested for the first time following the bonfire tragedy at Texas A&M University in 1999, when 12 students were killed and another 27 students were injured following the collapse of a massive, vertical wood structure while preparing for the campus's annual bonfire (Carlson, 2007). Almost immediately, plans to construct a permanent memorial began. This intentional, symbolic activity included collecting and cataloging all of the items left at the bonfire site. Even the flowers that were left as temporary memorials were composted and tilled into the soil at the memorial site (Carlson, 2007; Texas A&M University, 2022).

The mass shooting at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University [Virginia Tech] in 2007 that left 32 dead and 17 injured continued to change the way that colleges and universities responded to student deaths as a result of a significant tragedy. Virginia Tech honored the immediate actions of mourners by working their spontaneous displays of grief into the permanent memorial site (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University [Virginia Tech], 2022) and transforming the academic building where the majority of deaths occurred into the Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention (Ezarik, 2017). Similarly, at the University of North Carolina Charlotte (UNCC), the university immediately began making plans for a permanent on-campus memorial after 2 students were killed and 4 students were injured in a classroom shooting in 2019. Its Niner Nation Remembrance Commission met for the first time less than one month after the attack and, by the end of the same year, had recommended a

permanent memorial as well as a repurposing of the classroom where the shooting occurred (Zimmern, 2019).

Also significant in these tragedies is Virginia Tech's and UNCC's use of the internet as a memorial place. Ezarik (2017) notes that Virginia Tech continues to maintain and update its "We Remember" web site, which, now fifteen years after the tragedy, is still linked from the university's main web page. Similarly, the UNCC also continues to update and maintain its Niner Nation Remembers site (University of North Carolina Charlotte, 2022). This not only attests to the trend that institutions are less inclined to hide shameful incidents than they once were (Foote, 2003), but also to the role that the internet can play in facilitating mourning and recognition of those who died (Pennington, 2013; Shelton, 2009).

Factors that Influence Decisions to Sponsor Campus Memorials

My prior research on factors that influence decisions to sponsor campus memorials found that three factors were critical in how an institution responded to a student death: institution type, student type, and type of death (Anderson, 2018). This section will summarize findings on each of these three areas and provide a framework for the constructs in this study.

Institution Type

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education is the standard framework used in the United States to identify comparable institutions for research purposes. A college or university's Carnegie Classification describes key characteristics such as level (highest degree awarded), size, setting, control, student composition, selectivity, and any special educational focus (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2021). Institutional classifications are based on annual data collected through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS]. Also termed "institutional type," these classifications also

indirectly describe aspects of mission and culture that are likely shared among similar institutions.

Institution type affects the formal response to a student death and how memorials are designed, if they are held at all. While a small, private institution had a unique, personal, and immediate response to student deaths, a large institution developed a single annual ceremony rich with symbols in which each decedent was recognized individually but identically (Anderson, 2018). Large institutions may find that the number of student deaths per year is potentially overwhelming for the entire study body, and therefore may minimize the number of memorials or the number of individuals involved in these events (Anderson, 2018). Similarly, an online institution and a primarily residential college may have very different needs. Private institutions may also have greater discretion to use monetary resources for ceremonies and memorials because they are not bound by the same procurement and spending policies that often apply to public institutions (Anderson, 2018).

Institutional Values

Institutional values also affect institutions' response to a student death. Administrators struggle to balance uniformity with uniqueness, as well as providing predictable, consistent responses to all student deaths with desires to personalize each memorial experience (Anderson, 2018). Some universities may find that uniformity better serves all students at their institution, while other colleges may see unique, personal ceremonies as the only appropriate option (Anderson, 2018). In addition, balancing transparency with privacy and respect for the deceased student's family, as well as balancing ongoing care for the student's family at the same time they closed their campus relationship with them, were both critical to institutional leadership (Anderson, 2018).

Institutional values may also include activities that protect it from harm. In a world that is increasingly litigious, it also follows that institutions may respond to some student deaths differently to avoid suggesting culpability or to limit potential legal liability (Beckham et al., 2007). Colleges and universities have faced lawsuits following a student death for negligence while performing a governmental function, negligence of employees, premises liability, injuries related to instruction or participation in campus activities, and failure to protect students from crime (Kaplin et al., 2020). Any such case results in direct costs of time, resources, and funding for the institution and its employees, even if the case is decided in their factor (Beckham et al., 2007). Indirect costs may include changes in enrollment or in student and parent satisfaction with the institution (Beckham et al., 2007; Rennie, 2007).

Similarly, with a 24-hour news cycle, a student death may also garner negative press for the institution and its brand (Rennie, 2007). Deaths resulting from hazing, alcohol consumption, campus safety, or institutional negligence, as well as deaths of well-known students or deaths by acts of violence, may also draw undesired attention to the institution (McCusker & Witherow, 2012; Rennie, 2007). The increased use of social media, online video, and texting and cell phone availability also contributes to the likelihood that a student death story may be told before the institution is even able to act (Rennie, 2007). Therefore, determining whether, in that moment, the institution places greatest value on transparency or on privacy and protection is an important distinction to make well in advance of a tragedy (McCusker & Witherow, 2012; Rennie, 2007).

Student Type

Student type plays a role in an institution's response to student death. Colleges and universities are now comprised of many types of students who do not fall within the 18-to-24-year-old residential demographic. Institutional communities include individuals on either side of

the age spectrum, from high school students in dual enrollment programs to adult learners to senior citizens availing themselves of free tuition benefits. Some students now take classes exclusively online or on branch campuses. Students may be studying abroad or studying away (Engstrom & Mathieson, 2012; Erfle & Dietrich, 2020). While one institution may choose to honor and recognize any student who dies while enrolled, another may choose not to sponsor any memorials at all because their commuter, primarily adult learner student population usually lacked connection with the deceased (Anderson, 2018).

"Memorials set a precedent for the future and thus need to be equitable. … schools should avoid constructing a large memorial for one student, then a minimal one for another student" (Paine, 2007, p. 2). While one professional similarly warns that "it's a slippery slope if the institution does a service for one student and not all" (Prepare Now for Responding, 2010, p. 5), some institutions openly acknowledge that some students' deaths merit particular attention. For instance, Purdue University recently renamed the student gate to the football stadium for a student who died of cancer who was a Purdue superfan (Cox, 2019). The University of California Los Angeles [UCLA] includes a particularly pertinent observation that

> on the human level, the campus response to such a death will vary based on the decedent's public prominence and the circumstances of the death. At the administrative level, the University's response will be based on the nature of the decedent's affiliation with the University (University of California Los Angeles, 1999, p. 1).

Type of Death

Type of death is a third factor that influences institution decisions to hold memorials, because of the resulting effects on survivors' grief and emotional needs. Off-time occurrences are non-normative and unanticipated events, and they can create significant distress for a surviving individual (Balk, 2011; Balk et al., 1993; Battle et al., 2013; Cox et al., 2016; Schlossberg

et al., 1995). The more problematic grief of students whose loved ones died by suicide, homicide, or accidents was nearly perfectly accounted for by the failure of their search for meaning to lead to any sustaining answers for a senseless loss (Neimeyer et al, 2008). For young adults, nearly four-fifths of all friends' deaths were due to these sudden, violent causes (Balk, 2011).

Balk (2011) notes that whether the death was preventable or intentional affects survivors' responses. Preventability compounds grief because it raises issues of blame and guilt directed toward oneself or others (Balk, 2011). Deaths by homicide or suicide often immediately result in shock and disbelief, which then tends to move toward anger or hostility directed toward the deceased or the perpetrator (Balk, 2011; Currier et al., 2008).

In addition, many student deaths are violent in nature (Balk, 2011). When the loss is sudden and grotesque, through incidents such as mutilating automobile accidents, suicide, or homicide, the challenge to survivors' capacity to make meaning of the tragic event can be even greater (Neimeyer et al., 2008). The extent to which the deceased suffered, particularly through terror or deliberately inflicted injury, also adds to grief's intensity and duration (Balk, 2011; Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014; Matthews & Servaty-Seib, 2007). Violent death is associated with more intense and disorganized grief for survivors (Currier et al., 2008). This occurs because heinous crimes shock our collective conscience and elicit a communal response because of the collective nature of our sentiments about those crimes (Hawdon, 2009).

Student death by suicide adds a unique set of considerations for student affairs administrators and also affects campus response (Brown, 2014; Corazzini & May, 1985). Suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals ages 18 to 24, exceeded only by accidental injury (Turner et al., 2013). In a previous study, administrators agreed that "suicides [were] the most anguishing" for everyone involved (Anderson, 2018, p. 39). Students

empathized with the deceased and wondered “Could I get so depressed? Could I get so stressed? So overwhelmed? So hopeless that something like that could happen to me?” (Anderson, 2018, p. 39).

Following a student suicide, peers are likely to express a strong desire to find a way to memorialize their deceased friend, teammate, or classmate. Memorials, however, have a high potential for presenting the death and the individual in an idealized light—a condition that for decades was believed to contribute to suicide contagion (CDC, 2001; Philip, 1990). In addition to dealing with students’ feelings of intense guilt or anger, administrative personnel are often focused on preventing the attribution of heroism to the person who died by suicide and discouraging copycat attempts (CDC, 2001; Westefeld et al., 2006). Colleges and universities are counseled to avoid presenting the deceased as a tragic hero, to emphasize that the death was unnecessary, and to avoid glamorizing or romanticizing the death in any way (Levine, 2008; Parrish & Tunkle, 2005; Philip, 1990). As a result, the institution may be less inclined to provide a closing ritual or memorial for an individual who has died by suicide and provide postvention education and training instead (Westefeld et al, 2006). However, “to follow the guidance of national mental-health experts is to walk a fine line” as an institution balances mourning and postvention strategies (Lipka, 2010, para. 1).

Additional Examples

Institutions approach the subject of memorials differently. Some institutions hold yearly memorials remembering all campus community members who died during the year; others create individualized memorials based on the student’s interests, talents, and associations. Some place markers or monuments on their campus. Some have no memorials at all.

At Purdue University, a memorial service is held each spring and fall semester for students who have died during that time. Named “Golden Taps,” it was modeled after a similar

ceremony at Texas A&M. The Purdue service is a nondenominational ceremony that is attended by family, friends, fellow students, and other members of the campus community. It is planned by the Dean of Students Office with collaboration from student government and campus musical organizations. The university presents family members with a certificate of attendance for each of the deceased students (Hamilton, 2008).

Appalachian State University, a 20,000-student regional public institution in Boone, North Carolina, changed their approach to student memorials following a three-year period in which 24 students died, many by suicide (Brennan, 2019). Administrators recognized that frequent campus-wide notification of the student deaths were traumatizing or retraumatizing students and that additional work was required to respond to student deaths "in a cohesive manner" (Appalachian State University, n.d., p. 1). The university compiled a student death protocol that not only addressed communications and student support, but also outlined approved memorials practices. Appalachian State's policy is unique in that it recognizes that "when a well-known student has died, it is common for informal 'memorial' groups or meetings to develop spontaneously," but it "does not promote, participate in or encourage individual memorials on campus" and specifies that "spontaneous memorials are not to be recognized in any official University communications" (p. 12). Instead, Appalachian State invites members of the campus community to contribute to a memory book that the university gives to the family of the deceased student. The university also sponsors an annual student memorial program that recognizes all deceased students. In addition, if the student's family gives permission, the student's name is included on a memorial board that is housed in the school's administration building (Brennan, 2019).

In contrast to these larger institutions' programs, Middle Georgia State University has chosen not to hold memorial ceremonies at all. Due to a consolidation in the last decade,

Middle Georgia has grown from an associate-level institution to a masters-level institution with five separate campuses. With a scattered population of approximately 7,500 students, Middle Georgia student affairs staff recognized that more traditional memorials were difficult to organize because most of their students were part-time and non-residential; many students only came to campus for class. In fact, because being a college student was often not the deceased student's primary identity, at times the institution did not even learn that the student died for weeks or even months after their death. As a result, Middle Georgia has chosen not to memorialize deceased students with an in-person ceremony. Following a student death, a university flag is flown in their honor for one day. That flag is later placed in a commemorative case, and, whenever possible, a student affairs administrator delivers the gift to the student's next of kin (Anderson, 2018; Middle Georgia State University News Bureau, 2021).

Some institutions have also expanded on the tradition of a posthumous degree by rewriting their policies to include presentation of a degree to a terminally ill student who has not and will not be able to complete their degree requirements. This award, presented for the benefit of "both the student and their family," in essence provides a memorial in advance of the student's death (University of Florida, 2022). Colorado State University, Drexel University, the University of Florida, the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, and the University of New Mexico already have such policies.

Chapter Summary

Student death is an eventuality for any college or university. Most institutions are prepared to implement a series of coordinated administrative processes and to provide emotional support to the campus community following a student death. The existing best practice literature details several tasks and actions that should be included in these institutional death response plans. However, much less attention is given to the decision or process of

sponsoring memorials for deceased college students, despite the positive role that memorials play in the mourning and bereavement process. While specific college and university practices and traditions have been described in student affairs literature, no publications provide a holistic picture of if, how, and why institutions sponsor memorials following the death of a college student or the variables and values that may influence those decisions. This absence indicates the need for additional information about institutional decisions to sponsor memorials following the death of a college student and is the purpose of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the methodology for this study, beginning with the development of the research questions and descriptions of the theoretical perspective and research design. I then discuss data collection methods, including the identification of participants, questionnaire development, distribution, and data tabulation and analysis. I also provide examples of the descriptive statistics that will be used for each research question and measures taken to preserve participant anonymity and minimize risk.

Research Question Development

After thoroughly reviewing the published literature on college student death and the findings from my prior study (Anderson, 2018), I identified the need for research specifically focused on institution-sponsored memorial practices for deceased college students. As I discussed in the literature review, while some publications mention holding or not holding a memorial following a college student death, no published research has gathered data from multiple institutions addressing what kind of memorials campuses hold, why certain decisions about memorials are made, and the variables that affect the likelihood that an institution will sponsor a memorial following the death of a student. Consequently, I determined that a quantitative, descriptive study involving senior student affairs officers from regionally accredited institutions across the United States would not only be an appropriate starting point for research on this subject, but also provide useful and valuable information for practitioners.

This subject has held my personal and professional interest for over two decades, beginning with an ethical dilemma following the death of a single student. As my professional

practice broadened and as I observed the many ways institutions memorialized deceased students, I began to question why so little was known about college and university memorial practices. While conducting interviews with senior student affairs officers for a doctoral program requirement, I gained an increased appreciation for the complexity, emotional intensity, and careful negotiation that sometimes accompanies college student deaths, as well as the difficult and immediate decisions student affairs administrators must often make when a student dies (Anderson, 2018). As I collected social media posts and news articles about student deaths and campus memorials, I observed a consistent theme of inconsistency in the way colleges and universities responded to student deaths.

I initially intended to focus this research on factors that affected whether an institution held a memorial for a deceased college student. I planned to use a quasi-experimental, factorial research design and develop a questionnaire to collect this data. However, because of the lack of existing information on student memorials, it was difficult to identify which factors were most appropriate for inclusion, additional study, and analysis. Further, as I attempted to create the questionnaire, I noticed that the majority of my questions focused on information I first needed to know about memorial practices, indicating a lack of congruence between what I thought I wanted to study and what I actually needed to learn.

After discussion with my dissertation advisor and committee, I reframed this study using an ex post facto design. To address the lack of information available on memorials for deceased college students, I developed direct, specific research questions about institutions' practices. I focused primarily on the questions I had hoped to answer through my literature review, but for which there was no or insufficient information. I used existing literature from related fields, particularly death studies, to identify variables and values that might affect the likelihood that an institution would sponsor a memorial for a deceased student (Balk, 1997, 2001, 2008, 2011;

Balk et al., 1993, 2010; Balk & Vesta, 1998; Battle et al., 2013; Brabant et al., 2008; Cousins et al., 2017; Cusick, 2008; Davidson & Doka, 1999; Dorney, 2016; Hai et al., 2018; Janowiak et al., 1995; Matthew & Servaty-Seib, 2007; Meshot & Leitner, 1993; O'Rourke et al., 2011; Sklar & Hartley, 1990: Streufert, 2004; Tedrick Parikh & Servaty-Seib, 2013; Westefeld et al., 2006; Wrenn, 1999). I also chose to focus on institutional decisions to sponsor or not to sponsor a memorial, not on the decision-making process at those institutions or the effects of those decisions on others.

The result was a list of specific research questions that shared a common theme of understanding if, why, and how institutions sponsor memorials for deceased college students, as well as understanding some of the differences and values that might affect institutional decisions and merit further study. Although the list of research questions was longer than those commonly presented for a dissertation, this clarity, structure, and order provided a framework that not only addressed many questions about student memorials that were yet unanswered, but that also provided an effective structure for the subsequent work of questionnaire development, data collection, and data analysis.

My research questions were:

1. How many institutions sponsor memorials for all or some deceased students? How many never sponsor memorials?
2. For institutions that never sponsor memorials for deceased students, what are the reasons they do not sponsor memorials?

For institutions that do sponsor memorials for all or some deceased students:

3. Does the institution have a written policy or practice that describes how the institution memorializes a deceased student?
4. Does the institution memorialize all deceased students in the same manner?

5. What types of memorials do they sponsor?
6. What are the institution's objectives for the memorial?
7. To what extent do variations in student type (e.g., graduate versus undergraduate) or student characteristics (e.g., well-known versus lesser-known) affect the likelihood that an institution will sponsor a memorial for a deceased student? Are some student types or student characteristics more likely to lead to a departure from the institution's established policy or practice than others?
8. To what extent do variations in the type of student's death (e.g., death by suicide, death for which the institution may be liable) affect the likelihood that an institution will sponsor a memorial for a deceased student? Are some types of death more likely to lead to a departure from the institution's established policy or practice than others?
9. How important are certain values (e.g., respecting the family's wishes or requests, maintaining uniformity) when institutions sponsor a memorial for a deceased student?
10. Are there other findings from this data that provide insight into institutional decisions to sponsor memorials for deceased students?

And, for each of these questions:

11. Are there differences in frequencies or significant differences between groups based on basic Carnegie classification, size, control, religious affiliation, number of student deaths per year, written memorial policy or practice, or decision to memorialize all student deaths in the same manner that provide additional insight into memorial practices?

Theoretical Perspective

A theoretical perspective is a set of assumptions about reality that informs the type of questions we ask and the answers we obtain to those questions (Crossman, 2020). This descriptive, ex post facto study embraces aspects of both the positivist and the post-positivist traditions. Positivism, or the belief that tangible and objective conclusions are possible through careful and precise examination of available evidence, is rooted in the collection or measurement of factual descriptive data. Research studies using the positivist tradition require an experimental design in which an unbiased analysis of independent variables occurs (Mertens, 2019). This perspective enables the researcher to form cause-effect relationships among the variable or variables included in the study (Mertens, 2019). While positivists limit research to what is directly observable, post-positivists expand that definition to include a subjective truth based on probability, rather than absolute certainty (Flick, 2009). Post-positivism, therefore, allows the study of not only what is, but also what is possible or probable. This approach was particularly appropriate to this study, in which senior student affairs officers were asked to use their experience and insight to predict the likelihood that their institution would sponsor a memorial under certain circumstances.

Research Design

This study combined features of both descriptive and ex post facto research design. The purpose of descriptive research is to identify characteristics, frequencies, trends, and categories using quantitative data collected from a large sample through surveys, observations, or case studies (Erikson, 2017). Descriptive studies are an important starting point when not much is known about a subject (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Although this design lacks the rigor of an experimental protocol because researchers do not manipulate or control variables, descriptive studies answer important questions about how, what, when, or where a problem or situation

occurs, and they lay the foundation for subsequent research (Erikson, 2017; Johnson & Christensen, 2019; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

Ex post facto design, or after-the-fact research, identifies the extent to which an independent variable or variables "may possibly affect" a dependent variable or variables (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 212; Erikson, 2017). With this design, researchers collect data using structured, predetermined research questions; categorical independent variables; and continuous dependent variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A critical condition of ex post facto research is that the categorical variable or variables of interest are determined by a condition that exists prior to the study, are not randomly assigned, and cannot be experimentally manipulated (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). This differentiates ex post facto research from experimental or quasi-experimental designs (Johnson & Christensen, 2019; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The continuous dependent variables are measured in terms of amount or degree, typically using instruments, with higher scores indicating higher levels of the variable being studied (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). These studies often use closed-ended questions to provide consistency when measuring data and to facilitate easier scoring, coding, and analysis using statistical procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Fink, 2016; Fowler, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2019). However, because multiple confounding factors could account for the subjects' inclusion in specific groups, the researcher is not able to conclude what effect the independent variable or variables had on the dependent variable or variables with certainty (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Internal validity also cannot be guaranteed; instead, the researcher can only identify difference between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The use of both design paradigms allowed me to collect and describe data on a subject that has not been previously addressed in the published literature. It also provided the

opportunity to identify differences between established groups that are commonly used to categorize higher education institutions, including basic Carnegie classification, size, control, and religious affiliation, as well as the approximate number of student deaths an institution experiences each year, whether or not the institution has a written memorial policy or practice, and whether or not the institution has chosen to memorialize all students in the same manner.

Additionally, I provided open-ended questions to identify omissions or issues with the questionnaire items, to collect unanticipated data, to allow participants to provide context for their responses, and to identify opportunities for future research. I did not require this data from all participants or use it to respond to the research questions; I only included this data in my analysis to illustrate practice. As such, its inclusion and collection did not meet the standard to classify this study as mixed-method research (Johnson & Christensen, 2019).

Data Collection

To respond to these research questions and appropriately apply these research designs, I needed to obtain data from a large sample that included multiple respondents from each of the defined institutional categories. In this section, I describe how I identified participants, developed and distributed the questionnaire, and collected and analyzed data.

Participants

I invited senior student affairs officers at regionally accredited colleges and universities in the United States to participate in this study. I selected senior student affairs officers rather than the individuals who organize memorial services for two reasons. First, respondents were asked to identify the reasons their current institution decided to sponsor or not sponsor memorials for deceased students. I believed that senior student affairs officers could answer this question more holistically and with a better sense of institutional objectives and values than a less-senior staff member could. Second, most senior student affairs officers have dealt with

numerous student deaths during the course of their professional careers, from which they could better estimate the likelihood that a memorial would be held for a deceased student. For these reasons, invited participants were also asked to not forward the questionnaire to another staff member, and a question confirming that the respondent was the senior student affairs officer at their current institution was a gateway question to begin the questionnaire.

I used purposeful sampling to identify participants for this study. Purposeful sampling allows a researcher to select participants based on the participants' known experience with the variables in question (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). To enhance external validity with such a study, the researcher selects a sample that is representative of the population along as many relevant demographic characteristics as possible (Johnson & Christensen, 2019).

To identify a representative sample, I paid an individual to help me compile a list of senior student affairs officers at regionally accredited higher education institutions in the United States. We began by using accrediting commissions' institutional membership directories to identify regionally accredited institutions in each area of the country. There are currently seven regional accrediting bodies in the United States: the Western Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). By using these commission directories, we ensured that the sample included an appropriate distribution and proportion of institutions from each state and from each general geographic area of the United States, using divisions already well-established in academia. This process also ensured that we gave all accredited institutions, including smaller professional schools, technical and

community colleges, and less-recognizable institutions, an equal initial opportunity for inclusion in the sample.

Each accreditor's institutional directory includes links to their members' institutional webpages. After following the link for each institution, we searched for the senior student affairs officer's name and email address using the "about," "leadership," "organizational chart," "cabinet," and/or "student affairs" pages that are commonly linked from headers on a higher education institution's home page. If we were unable to find the name and email address for the senior student affairs officer on these pages, we used the search feature on the institution's website and then the campus directory, if available to an off-campus audience, to attempt to obtain this information. Once found, we added the individual's institution, state, name, position, and email address to an Excel spreadsheet that later served as the distribution list.

As we conducted these searches, if we could identify a senior student affairs officer's name but not find the individual's email address, we attempted to find other email addresses at that institution and use the same structure to make a reasonable guess about the senior student affairs officer's email address. For instance, if most emails at the institution were structured as firstname.lastname@institution.edu, we used that same format for the senior student affairs officer's email address. On our spreadsheet, we noted that these email addresses were not confirmed, knowing that these individuals' invitations to participate might not be delivered and that I might have to exclude those individuals from the sample size. If, after approximately five minutes of searching, the name of an institution's senior student affairs officer was not evident, we skipped that college or university and proceeded to the next institution on the accreditor's membership directory.

Using this process, we compiled a list of over 1400 senior student affairs officers for inclusion in this sample. Then, after learning about name and email search services available

through Higher Ed Direct (www.hepinc.com), we used this company to attempt to find emails we could not confirm earlier in the search process. By using Higher Ed Direct's administrative category 32, "Chief Student Affairs/Life Officer," we were also able to identify prospective participants from institutions for which we were previously not able to identify a senior student affairs officer.

The final mailing list of 1,572 senior student affairs exceeded Gay et al.'s (2012) sample size recommendations for descriptive, quantitative research. Embracing the philosophy that "the larger the sample size, the better," I hoped this sample size would help offset the possibility of a low response rate (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015, p. 184).

Questionnaire Development

A questionnaire is a method for collecting primary data using carefully structured questions; it is a common data collection method (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Fink, 2016). Questionnaires can be distributed to a large number of participants, including individuals who may live a significant distance from the researcher (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). With options for electronic distribution, this distribution often occurs with little to no cost. Questionnaires also allow respondents to answer with anonymity, which may lead to increased openness or honesty about sensitive or controversial issues than they might be if interviewed in person (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). However, when using questionnaires, researchers also run the risk that a respondent could misinterpret questions or make errors when responding, which the researcher does not have the opportunity to clarify or correct (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Questionnaires also have a lower response rate than other, more personal, approaches, which could limit the methods of data analysis available to the researcher and the generalizability of their findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Despite this possibility, an electronically-distributed questionnaire was the most efficient and practical method of

collecting data from a large sample of professional participants located throughout the United States.

Because there were no prior studies or available instruments to collect data on student memorials at colleges and universities, I developed a questionnaire to collect data based on my research questions. The questionnaire is included in Appendix D. In each section, the questions and responses are based on real or probable circumstances identified in previous research (Anderson, 2018), through the literature review, from personal professional practice, from news sources and social media, and from feedback and experiences that various student affairs professionals shared. Particular attention was given to ensure that each question expressed only one idea and did not lead respondents to a particular answer (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

At the beginning of the questionnaire, I summarized basic informed consent principles, gave respondents the option to skip questions, and provided the researchers' contact information. In addition, to ensure that the survey was completed by senior student affairs officers, the respondents were asked a gateway "yes/no" question about whether they currently held this position at their institution. If the respondent answered "no," the survey automatically skipped to a closing page, on which I thanked them for their willingness to participate and gave them an opportunity to request the survey results. If the respondent answered "yes," they were directed to the first section of the questionnaire. Participants could not begin the questionnaire without responding to this question.

The first section of the questionnaire included directions for the respondent to base all of their answers on their current institution's policy or practice. After providing definitions for memorial, sponsorship, and administrative or support functions, respondents were asked whether their current institution sponsors memorials for deceased students. I provided three possible answers in a forced-choice response: "always," "sometimes," and "never." Responses

to this question provided frequency data to answer the first research question about institutional sponsorship. I also used these responses to route respondents through the remainder of the questionnaire, and I used them for categorical variables in the data analysis.

Respondents who answered “never” to the sponsorship question were asked to provide the reasons that their institution does not sponsor memorials; this question paralleled my second research question. Since I found no information in the literature that addressed why institutions chose to not sponsor memorials for any students, I based the response options to this question on my prior research and probable reasons gathered from personal practice (Anderson, 2018). Because the primary purpose of this question was to collect frequency information on all the reasons that an institution decided not to sponsor memorials, participants were allowed to select multiple responses. An “other” option with a space to write in comments was also used to gather responses I had not considered or included. Once this question was answered, participants were automatically directed to the last section of the survey where institutional information was collected. I then thanked respondents for their time and gave them an opportunity to request the study results.

The remainder of content questions in the questionnaire were directed to respondents who answered “always” or “sometimes” to the sponsorship question, indicating that their current institution sponsors memorials for all or some deceased students. Participants were asked a “yes/no” question about whether their current institutions had a written policy or practice that describes how they memorialize a student who dies while attending their institution. I included this question because the recommendation to have a written student death plan was repeatedly cited in the literature (McCauley & Powell, 2007; Rickgarn, 1987, 1994; Streufert, 2004; Walker, 2016). While I found many student death plans online (see Appendix A), very few specifically addressed memorials, and then only tangentially. This

question helped me better understand if and how institutions planned for this eventuality and provided frequency data to answer my third research question on whether or not the institution has a written policy or practice that describes memorials for deceased students. I also used these "yes/no" responses as categorical variables to conduct statistical analysis later in the study.

To answer the fourth research question, I asked respondents a second "yes/no" question about whether their current institution memorialized all deceased students in the same manner. After I read several accounts about institutions that held annual group memorials which were often highlighted for their ceremonial impact (Appalachian State University, n.d.; Carlson, 2007; Hamilton, 2008), I was curious to learn whether institutions used a consistent, uniform approach to memorials following all student deaths. This "yes/no" response was also used as a categorical variable to investigate other data later in the study.

Next, to answer the fifth research question on the types of memorials that institutions sponsor, I asked respondents who reported that their current institution always or sometimes sponsored memorials how their institution memorializes deceased students. I included 12 options that were gathered from practices described in the literature review and on various university websites (Anderson, 2018; Foote, 2003; Hoy, 2013; O'Rourke et al., 2011; Siegel, 1994; Streufert, 2004; Wrenn, 1999; Zinner, 1985b). An "other" option with a space to write in additional information was also provided for responses I had not considered or included. Participants were able to select multiple responses because the primary purpose of this question was to gather data on the variety of memorial options that an institution might choose. The frequency data gathered through this question indicated which memorial practices were more common than others.

I composed the next item on the questionnaire to address the sixth research question on an institution's objectives for sponsoring memorials. This question was structured in a similar manner to the previous question, with five possible responses along with an "other" option with a space for write-in answers; responses were based on purposes for memorials that were identified during the literature review (Balk, 2011; Bazan, 2016; Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014; Collins, 2004; Corazzini & May, 1985; Doka, 2003; Fagjenbaum et al., 2012; Frew & Forsdike, 2022; Halberg, 1986; Hamilton, 2008; Hawdon, 2009; Hawdon & Ryan, 2011; Hoy, 2013; Kollar, 1990; Manning, 2000; McCusker & Witherow, 2012; O'Rourke et al., 2011; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998; Worden, 2009; Zdziarski, 2016). As with other questions, since the primary purpose for this question was to collect frequency information on all the objectives an institution hopes to address through a memorial, participants were allowed to select multiple responses. These answers provided the frequency data necessary to answer the research question.

Student type and type of death featured prominently in the literature review and in my prior research (Anderson, 2018; Balk, 2011; Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014; Brown, 2014; Corazzini & May, 1985; Currier et al., 2008; Levine, 2008; Lipka, 2010; Matthews & Servaty-Seib, 2007; Neimeyer et al, 2008; Paine, 2007; Parrish & Tunkle, 2005; Philip, 1990; Westefeld et al, 2006). I consequently focused the next section of the survey on the likelihood that an institution would sponsor a memorial for a deceased student in a variety of different, and sometimes complicated, situations. I purposefully chose to structure these questions to address the likelihood or possibility of a memorial, knowing that most respondents would not have personal experience with the death of a student from each student type or due to each type of death. However, I continued to structure this question within the context of their current institution to

provide consistency in later analysis. These items also provided the data to answer my seventh and eighth research questions.

While I considered nearly 25 options for the question on student type, I selected nine types that are relatively common on most college campuses for the questionnaire. Based on my professional experience, memorials for these student types would likely have varying degrees of support: an undergraduate student, a graduate student, a fully online student, a part-time student, a commuter student, an adult learner (age 25 or older), a non-degree seeking student, a well-known student (such as an athlete, student leader, online influencer), and a comparatively unknown student. Respondents were asked, “Based on your experience and insight, how likely is it that your current institution would sponsor a memorial for the following types of students?” Data for each student type was collected on a seven-point Likert-type scale with values that ranged from “definitely would not” to “definitely would,” and a neutral response of “unsure” at the midpoint (Fink, 2016; Fowler, 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The neutral response was included because not allowing truly neutral persons to pick neutral options increases force-choice bias as respondents pick options that do not truly reflect their views (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). For the student type question, there was also a “not applicable” option for respondents whose campus communities did not include that particular student type. For instance, this possibility was anticipated when an associate’s college was asked to rate the likelihood for “a graduate student” or if a residential campus was asked to rate the likelihood for “a fully online student.” These “not applicable” responses were removed from the analysis, which also occurred if a participant skipped one of the items.

Writing the question on type of death was more difficult, as each death has its own unique features and compounding variables (Stephenson, 1985). I considered over 40 different response options for this question, and I eventually selected 10 scenarios that I believed

accurately depicted a variety of types of death that I had documented through news stories, social media, and other sources (Cardine, 2021; Collins, 2021; Hatch, 2022; Hutchinson, 2021; Jaschik, 2021a, 2021b; Jones, 2021; Kwasnik, 2021, 2022; McNeel, 2021; Omastiak, 2021; Rosario, 2021; Stegall, 2021). These types of death included a student who dies by suicide, from a drug or alcohol overdose, unexpectedly from natural causes, from natural causes following a known illness, as a result of criminal activity or negligence, as a result of their involvement in criminal activity, as a result of a hate crime, in an incident for which the institution may be liable, in a highly publicized incident (e.g., major accident, mass shooting, natural disaster, terrorist attack), or multiple students in one incident (e.g., an automobile accident). Respondents were asked, "Based on your experience and insight, how likely is it that your current institution would sponsor a memorial under the following conditions?" Data for each student type was again collected on a seven-point Likert type scale with values that ranged from "definitely would not" to "definitely would," and a neutral response of "unsure" at the midpoint (Fink, 2016; Fowler, 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Since all types of death were possible, regardless of the institution's student population, a "not applicable" response option was not included on this question.

The student types and the types of death were not mutually exclusive; these fictitious students could easily belong to multiple groups and deaths may result a combination of circumstances. Consequently, I only calculated measures of central tendency and variance for each student type and each type of death, not for the categories as a whole. Following each of these items, I also asked respondents a "yes/no" question to determine if sponsoring a memorial for that particular type of student would be considered a departure from their current institution's policy or practice. I included this question because I had learned that all student deaths are not the same from the many news stories, social media posts, and examples from

professional practice that I reviewed prior to beginning this research (Cox, 2019; Paine, 2007; University of California Los Angeles, 1999). The death of a student who is quite popular will likely garner much more attention than a student who is not. The death of a graduate student might not attract much attention at a large, doctoral institution but might be profoundly felt within the student's academic department. This question acknowledged that for both positive and negative reasons, an institution might not do the same thing they would normally do, with the goal of identifying the extent to which institutions departed from their regular policy or practice and if there were certain situations that might cause a departure more than others.

Finally, I asked participants to rate how important certain values are when their institution sponsors a memorial for a deceased student. This question also used a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "not important at all" to "extremely important," and including a neutral option at the midpoint (Fink, 2016; Fowler, 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The 10 values I chose -- providing a unique, personal memorial; maintaining uniformity; providing transparency; honoring the family's wishes or requests; respecting students' wishes or requests; providing closure for members of the institutional community; fostering social justice; avoiding potential legal liability; maintaining positive public relations; and following best practices – were identified through their inclusion in the professional literature and prior research (Anderson, 2018; Balk, 2001, 2008; Beckham et al., 2007; Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014; Callahan & Fox, 2008; Cusick, 2018; Dorney, 2016; Frew & Forsdike, 2022; Hawdon, 2009; Kaplin et al., 2020; McCusker & Witherow, 2012; Rennie, 2007; Zinner, 1985b). Again for this question, I collected measures of central tendency and variance; there was no summed score for the category as a whole.

I then provided participants with an open-ended question about whether there was other information about their memorial policy or practices that they would like to share. The

intent of this question was three-fold: to identify additional situations or issues that I had not previously considered, to identify potential omissions or errors in the questionnaire, and to identify possible options for later research. While I carefully reviewed each comment, there was no formal analysis of this data.

The final section of the survey was given to all respondents, including those who never sponsored memorials for deceased students. I collected basic information about the respondents' institutions, including which office was responsible for memorial services on their campus, basic Carnegie classification, size, control, religious affiliation, and approximate number of student deaths per year. I was careful to ensure that this combination of data would not identify any institution or compromise a respondent's anonymity, but that it was also inclusive enough to verify that the respondents constituted a representative sample of institutions in the United States. Each of the five institutional traits were later used as categorical variables to disaggregate data and explore differences between groups.

Questionnaire Delivery

I selected the internet-based Qualtrics XM survey management software to present and distribute my questionnaire. I chose Qualtrics because its platform allows for randomization of presented responses, if-then condition flow, and secure data collection. It also has the functionality to limit participants from completing the survey more than once, as well as the option to track whether or not an invited participant has responded without compromising the anonymity of their responses. This software is also mobile-friendly and adapts easily to various browsers, ensuring that participants were able to complete the questionnaire using whatever device was most convenient for them.

After building the survey, I asked a convenience sample of 12 colleagues and associates to complete the Qualtrics questionnaire to ensure that it worked properly, that questions were

written in clear language without excess jargon, that responses were correctly recorded, and that the resulting data was in the format I needed for subsequent analysis. These individuals were also asked to record the amount of time it took them to complete the questionnaire, which confirmed the initial 7-8-minute time estimate provided by the Qualtrics software.

Establishing Content Validity

One way that content validity may be established is by asking experts whether the items on a questionnaire are representative of the attitudes and traits studied (Fink, 2016). After receiving comments and suggestions from the members of my dissertation committee and incorporating them into the questionnaire, I asked five executive-level student affairs professionals to review the research questions, questionnaire invitation, and questionnaire. Each completed a feedback form on which they evaluated whether each item on the questionnaire answered or contributed to an answer to the research questions, if each item should remain on the questionnaire, and if edits should be made to any of the wording or response options. I made minor modifications to the questionnaire based on this feedback, including changes to the items related to death from natural causes. Three respondents expressed concerns about the questions on exceptions to current practice; however, none provided suggestions or solutions that I had not already considered in prior edits. A copy of the feedback form that I used to assess content validity is provided in Appendix B.

Human Research Determination

After updating my Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training, receiving the approval of my dissertation committee, and making all requested edits to my research methodology and questionnaire, I submitted a request for an exemption from the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB). This study qualified for exempt status under the surveys, interviews, and behavioral observation of adults condition (DHHS Exempt 2), because

the information obtained was recorded so the identity of the human subjects could not be readily ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects (University of Georgia Human Rights Protection Program, 2021). I also did not ask participants to reveal personal information in the survey.

The University of Georgia Human Subjects Office conducted a preliminary review of the submission and requested four changes: classification of survey participants as a vulnerable population based on their professional positions as employees of various colleges and universities; an invitation to participate in research letter that more strictly followed the template provided by the Human Subjects Office; additional documentation of security and privacy measures for internet research; and a full list of identified participants and their institutional affiliation so each college or university could be approved as a separate research site. After submitting these changes to the proposal, the Human Subjects Office determined that this research did not qualify as human research; therefore, I was not required to obtain Institutional Review Board approval or exemption. A copy of this determination letter is included in Appendix F. I discarded the changes I made to comply with the Human Subjects Office's initial requests. This review resulted in a six-week delay in the release of the survey.

Invitations to Participate

The survey opened on Monday, January 30, 2023, and remained open for fifteen days. Using Qualtrics, I sent each senior student affairs officer on my mailing list a personalized invitation to participate using their title, name, position, and institution. To decrease the likelihood that information security measures in place at colleges and universities would block my email or route it to participants' email junk folders, I distributed the invitation through a Qualtrics-provided email address which the company reported had a history of clearing security firewalls; the "reply to" email address for the invitation was my own university student email

account (Qualtrics, 2023). One week later, on February 6, I sent reminder emails to recipients who had not yet responded using the Qualtrics anonymize response feature, which ensured that I did not know who had already responded to the survey and who had not.

The invitation email acknowledged that responding to a student's death can be one of the most difficult situations a student affairs officer faces in the course of their work. I further explained that there is no published research on memorials for deceased students and invited the recipient to help establish this knowledge base. After providing informed consent and contact information, participants were provided with a link to the survey. I also included a separate link for participants and other interested individuals to request survey results. The invitation letter is included in Appendix C.

Informed Consent

The invitation to participate in the study, as well as the information contained on the survey launch page, included information on the purpose of the study, procedures for completing it, potential risks, potential benefits, and anonymity. It also addressed participant rights, including the right not to participate in or not to complete the study and the right not to answer every question. Even though I was not required to include these IRB human subjects requirements, I considered these disclosures to be a critical component of ethical research. My contact information and my dissertation committee chair's contact information were provided, and respondents were informed that the University of Georgia's Human Subjects Office had determined that this study did not qualify as human research.

Minimizing Risk

Because the individuals invited to participate in this study were experienced student affairs and higher education professionals, the questions asked in this study posed no greater personal, psychological, or emotional risk than that encountered in their everyday professional

lives. However, as most also manage considerable portfolios, the imposition on their limited time was likely a greater consequence of participation.

I minimized risks to anonymity through the breadth of senior student affairs officers who were invited to participate in the study. No specific identifying information about either the participant or the institution they represented were requested at any time. The large number of higher education institutions in the United States, along with the use of broad categorical variables, ensured that no combination of data could be used to identify a particular institution with any degree of certainty unless the participant voluntarily provided this information in their comments.

In addition, there was no connection between the participant's email invitation, personalized link to the questionnaire, and their questionnaire response. The temporary digital records of participants' responses were stored securely on the Qualtrics XM web platform, were accessible only to me, and were password protected. At the end of the response period, I closed the Qualtrics questionnaire, downloaded the data, and deleted the files from the Qualtrics server. I redacted any identifying information from the file and stored it on my personal computer and on a back-up disk. As this file contains no identifying information, I will retain it until the project reaches a natural conclusion, either through dissemination or publication.

Benefits to Participants

While there was no direct benefit from participating in this study, participating did have indirect benefits for respondents. These benefits included the opportunity to privately evaluate their institution's student memorial practices, identify memorial activities that their institution could implement, and contribute to another professional's academic attainment goal. Once the results are compiled and distributed, participants may use it to further develop, refine, build, or simplify their practice on their own campus.

Ethical Considerations

In the three months prior to this mailing, there were two separate, highly-publicized murders in the United States, each of which resulted in the deaths of multiple college students (Boone & Geranois, 2022; Rankin, 2022). Just two weeks before the survey's launch, a well-known student athlete from another institution was killed in an automobile accident following a campus celebration of the team's winning season; an athletics staff member was also killed in the incident and other team members were injured (Newburry, 2023). I was initially concerned that releasing invitations to the senior student affairs officers at these institutions would be insensitive, especially because there were questions about similar situations on the questionnaire. I considered sending a separate invitation to senior student affairs officers at those schools and any others that faced similar tragedies in the time between my prospectus defense and survey release date. After careful consideration, I decided that these specific incidents were not the only deaths that merited consideration on these campuses and that I wanted the student affairs officers at these institutions to be empowered to make their own decisions about participation. Everyone on my mailing list received an invitation to participate, regardless of recent events at their institutions.

Data Analysis

As an exploratory study, data analysis primarily involved descriptive statistics, including the use of means, frequencies, percentages, and crosstabulation to report, compare, and contrast data. When the sample size allowed, additional statistical analysis, including chi square tests of independence, t-tests, or analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to identify whether or not there were significant differences between certain groups. I used IBM SPSS Statistics version 28 to tabulate this data and complete these tests, with independent categorical variables that included: basic Carnegie classification, size, control, religious

affiliation, approximate number of deaths per year, written memorial policy or practice, and uniform memorial policy or practice. Dependent variables included whether an institution always, sometimes, or never sponsored memorials; the likeliness scores for student types and types of death; and the participants' reasons, objectives, and values responses. Other combinations of variables were included in the analysis when descriptive data indicated a potential significant finding.

Chapter Summary

Using a descriptive and ex post facto research design and a questionnaire created specifically to address each of my research questions, I collected data on institutional memorial sponsorship practices from senior student affairs officers at institutions across the United States. In this chapter, I provided detailed information on how I identified participants, developed the research questions and questionnaire, collected and tabulated data, and ensured ethical research standards were followed. In the next chapter, I will share the data collected and the analysis results.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter, I provide the results of the questionnaire, including response rate, institutional representation, and descriptive data that answers each research question. I also provide the results of statistical analysis, outline problems encountered in data collection, and include clarifying comments participants provided in response to open-ended or free-text items throughout the questionnaire.

Respondents

Response Rate

I distributed 1,572 personal invitation emails and survey links using the email distribution feature in the Qualtrics XM survey management platform. The sample included senior student affairs officers at institutions in every state, from every basic Carnegie classification, from every institutional size and control, and from various religious affiliations. During the initial mailing, 35 emails failed to send, indicating that the email address may have no longer been valid for that institution, and an additional 75 emails "bounced," indicating that they did not reach the recipient's inbox due to security firewalls, filters, or incorrect domain names (Qualtrics XM Support, 2023). Despite comprising nearly 5% of the sample, Qualtrics Support (2023) still classified this a low bounce rate. One week later, I sent a personalized reminder email to all potential participants who had either not started or not finished the survey. That email resulted in two additional bounces. In total, 1,460 survey invitations were successfully delivered, 611 invitations were opened, and responses were submitted for 207 surveys, for a response rate of 14%.

Six individuals reported that they were not the senior student affairs officer at their institution, which triggered the questionnaire to immediately skip to a closing page thanking the individual for their willingness to participate in the study and providing a link to another form on which they could request the results if desired. The remaining 201 respondents who reported that they were the senior student affairs officer at their institution continued on to the remainder of the survey.

Completion

In the survey instructions, I informed participants that they could skip any question. Because almost all of the questions on the survey focused on a separate, distinct aspect of institutional memorials, I provided this option so participants did not stop the survey if they encountered a question that was difficult to answer or that they were unwilling to answer. In addition, I believed that obtaining responses to the questions related to departures from practice could be problematic due to the screen width required to view these questions; these items were easy to overlook if the respondent was using a phone or tablet to complete the survey, but I could not find a better layout option for these questions. I also suspected that the departure from practice questions might be the point at which the survey length caused respondents to stop without addressing the remaining questions.

This did occur, to some extent, although the cause cannot be determined. While 90% of respondents (*n* = 188) completed the demographic data at the end of the survey and 78% of respondents (*n* = 142) who received the questions related to student death and type of death completed them, only 45% of respondents (*n* = 85) who received the departure from practice questions responded to these items. Two-thirds of survey respondents (*n* = 137) spent 7-8 minutes responding to the questionnaire. Twelve percent (*n* = 24) spent nine to 10 minutes on the questionnaire, and an additional 17% (*n* = 35) kept the survey open for up to an hour,

presumably with interruptions. Only 11 surveys were open for longer than an hour, including two that were started and finished on different days.

Institutional Representation

I compared the institutional classification data provided by 188 of the respondents with data from the National Center on Education Statistics (2022) and the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education to determine if the responses received were proportional with the number of colleges and universities in the United States in each category. The results of this comparison were consistently within a range of 3-8% with four exceptions. First, 39% of respondents (*n* = 73) reported an affiliation with a doctoral degree granting institution; this percentage represents approximately 15% of all doctoral degree granting institutions in the United States and more than double the response rate for other institution types. Second, only one respondent from a for-profit institution participated in the survey, although there are over 2,000 for-profit institutions in the United States and for-profit institutions from every state were included in the distribution list. Similarly, only two respondents reported an affiliation with a special focus institution, and no institutions reported that they were a tribal college or an exclusively graduate/professional school. Finally, 20 senior student affairs officers self-reported the size of their institution as “very large.” Since only 44 institutions in the United States are in this size category, which is assigned only to associate’s degree granting institutions, these responses were likely a personal evaluation of the size of their campus enrollment and not a literal interpretation of the Carnegie definition for size.

Data

In this section, I provide the data collected to respond to each research question, as well as the results of tests to identify significant differences among groups, including chi square tests of independence and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Because the number of independent and

categorical variables in this study allowed for an unwieldy number of possible statistical tests, I have only provided the results of this analysis when the data contributed to an increased understanding of a construct.

Institutional Sponsorship

After providing respondents with definitions for a memorial, institutional sponsorship, and administrative or support functions, I asked whether the respondent's current institution sponsors memorials for deceased students. This item was used to collect frequency data to answer the first research question: "How many institutions sponsor memorials for all or some deceased students? How many do not?" Out of 199 responses, slightly more than a third of respondents (34.7%) reported that their current institution always sponsors memorials for deceased students. Another 44.2% reported that their current institution sometimes sponsors memorials for deceased students. The remaining 21.1% of respondents reported that they never sponsor memorials for deceased students. These responses also served as the routing variables for the remaining sections of the survey.

I then used crosstabulation and chi square tests for independence to determine whether or not significant relationships existed between institutional sponsorship practice and the categorical variables of the institution's basic Carnegie classification, size, control, religious affiliation, and approximate number of deaths per year. While these chi square tests indicated significant relationships between institutional sponsorship practice and institutional Carnegie classification, institutional control, religious affiliation, and approximate number of deaths per year, several of the tests violated the chi square assumption that at least 80% of the expected value cells must equal 5 or higher. Because of this, I used Fisher's Exact Test instead. The Fisher's Exact Test indicated significant relationships between institutional sponsorship practice and institutional Carnegie classification, $p < .001$; institutional control, $p = .006$; institutional control,

p = .006; and approximate number of deaths per year, *p* = .004. There was no significant relationship between institutional sponsorship practice and institutional size, *p* = .064. The frequencies for each of these variables are summarized in Table 1, along with the results of Fisher's Exact Test.

Table 1

Crosstabulation and Fisher's Exact Test Results for Institutional Sponsorship Practices and Institutional Characteristics

Institutional Characteristic	Always Sponsor		Sometimes Sponsor		Never Sponsor		*p*
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	
Carnegie Classification							< .001
Doctoral	34	46.6	29	39.7	10	13.7	
Master's	16	30.8	25	48.1	11	21.2	
Baccalaureate	13	54.2	9	37.5	2	8.3	
Associate's	1	2.7	17	45.9	19	51.4	
Special focus	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	
Institutional Size							.064
Very small	5	38.5	3	23.1	5	38.3	
Small	27	41.5	30	46.2	8	12.3	
Medium	16	23.9	33	49.3	18	26.9	
Large	6	27.3	10	45.5	6	27.3	
Very large	10	50.0	5	25.0	5	25.0	
Institutional Control							.006
Public	32	27.8	49	42.6	34	29.6	
Private	31	43.1	33	45.8	8	11.1	
For-profit	1	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Religious Affiliation							.006
Religious affiliation	23	54.8	14	33.3	5	11.9	
No affiliation	41	28.1	68	46.6	37	25.3	
Approximate Number of Deaths Per Year							.004
0-3 deaths	44	31.9	67	48.6	27	19.6	
4-6 deaths	6	24.0	12	48.0	7	28.0	
7-9 deaths	4	33.3	2	16.7	6	50.0	
10-12 deaths	4	57.1	1	14.3	2	28.6	
13 or more deaths	6	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
Total	64	34.0	82	43.6	42	22.3	

As reported in Table 1, only two respondents who reported that their current institution never sponsors memorials were affiliated with a baccalaureate institution and none were affiliated with a special interest institution. In contrast, while only one associate's college reported that they always sponsored memorials for deceased students, more than half of the same group (51.4%) reported that they never sponsor memorials for deceased students. Private colleges were more likely to "always" or "sometimes" sponsor memorials than their public peers, and religiously-affiliated institutions were more likely to "always" or "sometimes" sponsor memorials than their secular peer institutions.

Reasons for Not Sponsoring Memorials

The next question provided frequency data to answer the second research question: "For institutions that never sponsor memorials for deceased students, what are the reasons they do not sponsor memorials?" Respondents (n = 42) were provided with eight reasons and were instructed to select as many reasons as applied to their institutional policy or practice. The three highest responses to this question were "difficulty treating all students the same" (69.0%), "difficulty creating a memorial that is appropriate for all students" (61.9%), and "student body is not residential or is spread among multiple campuses" (45.2%), all of which also highlight an awareness of potential equity and diversity concerns. Responses to this question are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Reasons that Institutions Never Sponsor Memorials for Deceased College Students

Reason	*n*	%
Difficulty treating all students the same	29	69.0
Difficulty creating a memorial appropriate for all deceased students	26	61.9
Student body is not residential or is spread among multiple campuses	19	45.2
Prefer to allow kinship groups to handle the ceremony	18	42.9
Other	9	21.4
Student body is too large	6	14.3
Fear number of deaths would be overwhelming to community	6	14.3
Cost	4	9.5
Lack of student interest	2	4.8

Seven of the nine respondents who selected “other” provided additional information as part of their response. Two of these responses specifically addressed student death by suicide, with one noting that there is a “fear deaths by suicide could be seen as celebrated” and the other commenting that it is difficult to determine the impact of a death by suicide. Another respondent mentioned that some families do not want this type of institutional recognition. The other write-in responses mentioned administrative tasks that were routinely completed or provided additional information about the institution.

When institution responses for “never” sponsoring memorials were disaggregated by institutional type, associate’s colleges had a much higher response to “student body is not residential or spread out among multiple campuses” (68.4%) than other institution types (doctoral university = 10.5%, master’s college or university = 21.1%). Associate’s colleges also had the lowest percentage (22.2%) that did not sponsor memorials because they “preferred to allow kinship groups to handle the ceremony,” while 50% of doctoral institutions that “never” sponsor memorials reported this as one reason for their decision. No other disaggregated data provided noticeable distinctions.

Policies and Practices

Respondents who selected “always” or “sometimes” on the question addressing sponsorship were then asked two “yes/no” questions. The first question was whether their current institution had a written policy or practice that describes how they memorialize a student who dies while attending their institution. The second question was whether their current institution memorialized all students in the same way. These responses created categorical variables that were later used to test for differences between institutions.

I believe it is important to note that the responses to these two questions were exactly the same: *Yes* = 52 (34.4%), *No* = 99 (65.6%), *n* = 151; however, additional crosstabulation, despite small numbers in some categories, revealed several additional differences. This data is provided in Table 3. Associate’s degree institutions were less likely to have a written policy (*Yes* = 4, 23.5%, *No* = 13, 76.5%) and were less likely to handle all student deaths in the same manner (*Yes* = 2, 11.1%; *No* = 16, 88.0%) than institutions in other Carnegie classifications. Very small institutions were the least likely to have a written policy (*Yes* = 2, 25%; *No* = 6, 75%). Small (*Yes* = 15, 26.3%; *No* = 42, 73.7%) and medium sized institutions (*Yes* = 12, 24.5%; *No* = 37, 75.5%) were less likely to handle all student deaths in the same manner, while very large institutions (*Yes* = 12, 80%; *No* = 3, 20%) were more likely to do so. While no categories indicated that institutions were more likely to have a written policy than not, very large institutions (*Yes* = 7, 46.7%; *No* = 8, 53.3%) and religiously affiliated institutions (*Yes* = 16, 43.2; *No* = 8, 53.3%) were the two groups that were more likely to have a written policy than other institutions. Once the estimated number of student deaths per year surpassed 6, institutions were more likely to have a written policy and were more likely to memorialize all deceased students in the same manner. Once the number of student deaths per year surpassed 9, all institutions (*n* = 11) reported memorializing all students deaths in the same manner.

Table 3

Crosstabulation of Institutional Policies and Practices and Institutional Characteristics

Institutional Characteristics	Written Policy				Same Manner			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Carnegie Classification								
Doctoral	22	34.9	41	65.1	26	41.3	37	58.7
Master's	14	34.1	27	65.9	11	26.8	30	73.2
Baccalaureate	9	40.9	13	59.1	11	50.0	11	50.0
Associate's	4	23.5	13	76.5	2	11.1	16	88.9
Special focus	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	2	100
Institutional Size [a]								
Very small	2	25.0	6	75.0	5	62.5	3	37.5
Small	20	35.7	36	64.3	15	26.3	42	73.7
Medium	14	28.6	35	71.4	12	24.5	37	75.5
Large	5	31.3	11	68.8	6	37.5	10	62.5
Very large	7	46.7	8	53.3	12	80.0	3	20.0
Institutional Control								
Public	27	33.8	53	66.3	32	39.5	49	60.5
Private	22	34.4	42	65.6	17	26.6	47	73.4
For-profit	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	100.0	0	0.0
Religious Affiliation								
Religious affiliation	16	43.2	21	56.8	13	35.1	24	64.9
No religious affiliation	33	30.6	75	69.4	37	33.9	72	66.1
Approximate Number of Deaths Per Year								
0-3 deaths	36	32.7	74	67.3	29	26.1	82	73.9
4-6 deaths	4	22.2	14	77.8	5	27.8	13	72.2
7-9 deaths	3	50.0	3	50.0	5	83.3	1	16.7
10-12 deaths	3	60.0	2	40.0	5	100.0	0	0.0
13 or more deaths	3	50.0	3	50.0	6	100.0	0	0.0
Total	49	33.8	96	66.2	50	34.2	96	65.8

Note: Fisher's Exact Test indicated a significant relationship between institutional decision to handle deaths in the same manner and basic Carnegie classification ($p = .032$), institutional size ($p < .001$), and approximate number of deaths per year, ($p < .001$).

[a] One respondent did not report the size of their current campus.

I used Fisher's Exact Test to test for significant relationships between having a written policy and institutional characteristics; none of these tests indicated a significant relationship.

However, Fisher's Exact Test did indicate a significant relationship between an institution's decision to handle all deaths in the same manner and basic Carnegie classification ($p = .032$), institutional size ($p < .001$), and approximate number of deaths per year, ($p < .001$).

Next, I used crosstabulation and chi square tests for independence to determine if significant relationships existed between sponsorship practice and whether the institution had a written memorial policy or practice and between sponsorship practice and whether the institution memorialized all deceased students in the same manner. This data is summarized in Table 4. These tests indicated significant relationships between institutional sponsorship practice and written policy on memorials, $\chi^2 (1, n = 151) = 6.30$, $p = .012$, and between institutional sponsorship practice and memorializing all student deaths in the same manner, $\chi^2 (1, n = 151) = 44.27$, $p < .001$. However, a review of the descriptive data also indicates some possible inconsistency, as 19.2% of respondents to this question stated that their institution sometimes sponsors memorials but also memorializes all students in the same manner.

Table 4

Crosstabulation and Chi-Square Results for Institutional Sponsorship Practices and Institutional Policies and Practices

Institutional Policy or Practice	Institutional Sponsorship Practice				χ^2
	Always Sponsor		Sometimes Sponsor		
	n	%	*n*	%	
Written Policy					6.30 *
Have a written policy	30	57.7	22	42.3	
Do not have a written policy	36	36.4	63	63.6	
Memorialize All Students in the Same Manner					44.27 **
Memorialize all the same	42	80.8	10	19.2	
Do not memorialize the same	24	24.2	75	75.8	
Total	66	43.7	85	56.3	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Types of Memorials

I then asked respondents who "always" or "sometimes" sponsored memorials for deceased students how their current institution memorializes deceased students. This question provided frequency data to answer the fifth research question: "For institutions that do sponsor memorials for all or some deceased students, what types of memorials do they sponsor?" Respondents were provided with twelve responses, asked to select as many as applied, and also provided with an "other" option on which they could make additional comments. The item with the highest response rate was "granting a posthumous degree or certificate of attendance" (61.8%, *n* = 97). All responses to this question are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Institution Sponsored Memorials for Deceased College Students

Memorial	*n*	%
Granting a posthumous degree or certificate of attendance	97	61.8
Individual memorial service, personalized for each deceased student	82	52.2
Recognition at commencement or other institutional ceremony	72	45.9
Physical memorial (i.e., plant a tree, memorial bench, include name on a monument or plaque)	68	43.3
Establishment of a scholarship or other fund	47	29.9
Gift or token to the family	44	28.0
Group memorial service for all students who have died within a particular time frame	39	24.8
Video or written messages to the family	35	22.3
Other	30	19.1
Social media post	27	17.2
Physical demonstration (i.e., flags flown at half-staff)	19	12.1
Individual memorial service, using the same format for all deceased students	16	10.2
Internet page or post	12	7.6

Note: If the three service responses were combined, "a memorial service" would be the most frequently sponsored memorial, *n* = 112, 74.1%.

The response options for the types of memorials that institutions sponsor included three different types of services: “individual memorial service, using the same format for all deceased students,” “individual memorial service, personalized for each deceased student,” and “group memorial service for all students who have died within a particular time frame.” It was important to me to identify these as three separate memorials due to the differing levels of uniformity, intimacy, and personalization inherent in each type. Because I was also curious about the frequency that institutions sponsored any type of memorial service, I tallied the respondents who chose at least one of the three memorial service responses when they answered this question. There were 112 respondents (74.1%) who selected one or more of these three types of memorial services, indicating that “a memorial service” is the most frequent type of sponsored memorial. I added this information as a note to Table 5 rather than placing it in the table to ensure that each item in the table’s memorial column was listed exactly like it appeared on the questionnaire.

Thirty respondents (19.1%) used the “other” response to provide additional information on this question. Six (3.8%) clarified the posthumous degree policy for their institution. Seven (4.5%) stated that any memorial would be coordinated with a student’s family. Four (3.5%) shared administrative processes, such as sending a notice to campus, that were beyond the scope of this survey. Others shared more unique practices on their campuses, including naming a non-monetary prize in the student’s honor, bell ringing, a memorial resolution from the Student Government Association, and recognition of deceased athletes at an athletic event. One student affairs officer stated that “we fly our institutional flag one day in honor of the student and then send it to the family.” A self-identified art and design college held a memorial exhibition with the deceased student’s art.

Objectives

Next, to answer the sixth research question, I asked respondents who answered "always" or "sometimes" to the initial sponsorship question to identify their institution's objectives when sponsoring a memorial. Respondents were provided with five objectives and the option to provide an "other" response, and they were instructed to select all answers that applied for their current institution. Responses received are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

Institutional Memorial Objectives

Objective	*n*	%
Provide members of the campus community with an opportunity for formal mourning	131	83.4%
Establish that the deceased was a valued member of the community	115	73.2%
Provide information about resources for distressed community members	103	65.6%
Help disseminate information about the mourning process	58	36.9%
Create a permanent remembrance on campus	30	19.1%
Other	28	17.8%

Of the 28 respondents who selected "other," 20 wrote in comments related to supporting the deceased student's family. These included "always aligned with the wishes of the family;" "engage family members with student friends, faculty, classmates;" "help the family cope with the loss;" and "honor the family's wishes." Other comments included a religious institution's response that they try to coordinate with the deceased student's clergy, minimizing the risk of contagion when death was by suicide, and that some of these objectives are met outside of the memorial process.

Student Type

Next, I calculated the likelihood that institutions would sponsor a memorial based on the deceased's student type. Respondents were given nine different student types and asked,

based on their experience and insight, to rate the likelihood that their current institution would sponsor a memorial for each type of student using a seven-point Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from “definitely would not” (1) to “definitely would” (7) sponsor. A “not applicable” option was included with this set of scenarios because each student type is not represented at all institutions; these responses were omitted from the data. A summary of these data is provided in Table 7.

Table 7

Likelihood that Institutions Would Sponsor a Memorial by Student Type

Student Type	*M* [a]	*n*	*SD*
A well-known student (athlete, student leader, online influencer, etc.)	6.35	141	1.083
An undergraduate student	6.15	142	1.226
A graduate student	6.09	119	1.135
A commuter student	6.08	139	1.251
A comparatively unknown student	5.83	139	1.555
An adult learner (age 25 or older)	5.81	139	1.444
A part-time student	5.55	138	1.603
A fully online student	4.92	132	1.922
A non-degree seeking student	4.48	133	1.812

[a] Based on a seven-point Likert-type scale

As indicated in Table 7, most respondents acknowledged that their institution would be more likely to sponsor a memorial for “a well-known student” than any other type of student (*M* = 6.35). This student type also had the smallest amount of variance among all responses (*SD* = 1.083), indicating the greatest amount of consistency in scoring among respondents. Two student types were identified as the least likely to have a memorial sponsored by their institution: “a fully online student” (*M* = 4.92) and “a non-degree seeking student” (*M* = 4.48), both of whom would likely have little association with an institution’s physical campus, if one exists, or members of the student body outside of their area of study.

In addition to asking participants to rate the likelihood of sponsoring a memorial for these types of students, I also asked a "yes/no" question about whether this decision would be a departure from their institution's usual practice. The original intent of this question was to challenge respondents to consider whether some student types were more likely to prompt a different sponsorship decision. Overwhelmingly, the departure from practice responses for each student type was "no," with at least 90% of respondents confirming that the likelihood that they reported was consistent with their institution's usual practice for all but one variable. The one variable that yielded a lower rate was "a non-degree seeking student," for which 86% of respondents indicated that their likelihood score was consistent with their institution's usual practice. Because the proportion of "yes" and "no" answers to the departure question were so unequal, I could not conduct other analysis using these two groups as categorical variables.

Instead, since respondents reported that their ratings were consistent with their usual practice, I decided that more could be learned by identifying which student types would be less likely to have a memorial by comparing student type with institutional sponsorship practices. This data is presented in Table 8. It indicates senior student affairs officers who reported that their institutions "always" sponsored memorials for deceased students also consistently scored each student type at or near the "definitely would sponsor" response, as indicated by the proximity of likelihood scores to the 7.0 maximum score. A non-degree student was the only exception (M = 5.73). However, when memorials are "sometimes" sponsored for deceased students, only one student type surpassed the "probably would sponsor" score of 6.0 and three scores fell within the "unsure" range.

To test for significant differences between groups, I conducted analysis of variance (ANOVA) using institutional sponsorship practice ("always" sponsor and "sometimes" sponsor) as independent variables and each student type as the dependent variable; I could have also

used t-tests to obtain the same results. The difference between institutions that always sponsor memorials and institutions that sometimes sponsor memorials was statistically significant for every student type ($p < .001$), with large effect sizes of over .138 (see Cohen, 1988) on every student type except a graduate student ($\eta^2 = .129$).

Table 8

Difference in Likelihood that Institutions Would Sponsor a Memorial by Student Type and Institutional Sponsorship Practice

Student Type [a]	Institutional Sponsorship Practice		*F ratio*	η^2
	Always (n = 64)	Sometimes (n = 83)		
	M	*M*		
A well-known student (athlete, student leader, online influencer, etc.)	6.98	5.94	42.771 *	.228
An undergraduate student	6.95	5.59	63.629 *	.305
A graduate student	6.94	6.04	21.403 *	.129
A commuter student	6.94	5.55	60.305 *	.294
A comparatively unknown student	6.77	5.27	42.493 *	.334
An adult learner (age 25 or older)	6.86	5.16	72.793 *	.227
A part-time student	6.63	4.94	51.724 *	.263
A fully online student	6.16	4.47	30.218 *	.172
A non-degree seeking student	5.73	4.04	32.364 *	.184

[a] Degrees of freedom 1, 145 for all student types. n = 147.

* $p < .001$

Type of Death

Next, I calculated the likelihood that institutions would sponsor a memorial for a deceased student based on their type of death. This question provided the data for my eighth research question. Respondents were given ten different death types and asked to rate the likelihood that their current institution would sponsor a memorial for a student who died under those circumstances using a seven-point Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from

"definitely would not" (1) to "definitely would" (7) sponsor. A not applicable option was not included with this set of scenarios because all of the death types included were documented and probable causes of college student death. These data are provided in Table 9.

Table 9

Likelihood that Institutions Would Sponsor a Memorial by Type of Death

Type of Death	*M* [a]	*n*	*SD*
Multiple students die in one incident (e.g., an automobile accident)	6.26	143	1.066
A student dies in a highly publicized incident (e.g., major accident, mass shooting, natural disaster, terrorist attack)	6.18	143	1.092
A student dies as a result of a hate crime committed against them	6.14	141	1.216
A student dies from natural causes following a known illness	6.02	143	1.292
A student dies unexpectedly from natural causes	6.01	143	1.295
A student dies as a result of another person's criminal activity or negligence	5.95	143	1.329
A student dies from a drug or alcohol overdose	5.78	143	1.444
A student dies by suicide	5.75	143	1.456
A student dies in an incident for which the institution may be liable	5.60	141	1.419
A student dies as a result of their involvement in criminal activity	4.89	143	1.638

[a] Based on a seven-point Likert-type scale

As illustrated in Table 9, the highest ratings were provided for types of death that are more likely to draw public attention, specifically "multiple students die in one incident" (*M* = 6.26, *n* = 143), "a student dies in a highly publicized incident" (*M* = 6.18, *n* = 143), and a student dies as a result of a hate crime committed against them" (*M* = 6.14, *n* = 141). The lowest likelihood rating was for a student who "dies as a result of their involvement in criminal activity" (*M* = 4.89, *n* = 143). This response also had the greatest variance in responses (*SD* = 1.638).

As with the research question and questionnaire items on student type, I then asked respondents a "yes/no" question about whether this decision based on type of death would be a departure from their institution's usual practice. The intent of this question was to challenge

respondents to consider whether some types of death were more likely to lead to a different sponsorship decision. As with student type, the departure from practice responses for each type of death were overwhelmingly "no," and the sample sizes were unequal preventing further analysis using that categorical variable.

Instead, I looked at the different ratings provided by respondents who reported that their institution "always" sponsored memorials for deceased students versus those who reported that their institution "sometimes" sponsored memorials. This review indicated that senior student affairs officers who reported that their institutions "always" sponsored memorials for deceased students also consistently scored each type of death at or near the "definitely would sponsor" response, as indicated by the proximity of likelihood scores to the 7.0 maximum score. However, when memorials are "sometimes" sponsored for deceased students, only one student type surpassed the "probably would sponsor" score of 6.0 and three scores fell within the "unsure" range.

Then, to test for significant differences between groups, I conducted analysis of variance (ANOVA) using the two types of institutional sponsorship practice ("always" sponsor and "sometimes" sponsor) as independent variables and each type of death type as the dependent variable; again, I could have also used t-tests to obtain the same results. The difference between institutions that "always" sponsor memorials and institutions that "sometimes" sponsor memorials was statistically significant for every death type ($p < .001$), with large effect sizes of over .138 (see Cohen, 1988) on every type of death. Table 10 illustrates these differences.

Table 10

Difference in Likelihood that Institutions Would Sponsor a Memorial by Type of Death and Institutional Sponsorship Practice

Type of Death [a]	Institutional Sponsorship Practice		*F ratio*	η^2
	Always (n = 63)	Sometimes (n = 81)		
	M	*M*		
Multiple students die in one incident (e.g., an automobile accident)	6.90	5.75	58.297 *	.291
A student dies in a highly publicized incident (e.g., major accident, mass shooting, natural disaster, terrorist attack)	6.87	5.64	65.968 *	.317
A student dies as a result of a hate crime committed against them	6.89	5.54	61.684 *	.306
A student dies from natural causes following a known illness	6.90	5.33	83.159 *	.369
A student dies unexpectedly from natural causes	6.90	5.32	84.666 *	.374
A student dies as a result of another person's criminal activity or negligence	6.86	5.25	82.175 *	.367
A student dies from a drug or alcohol overdose	6.79	5.00	88.797 *	.385
A student dies by suicide	6.78	4.95	91.957 *	.393
A student dies in an incident for which the institution may be liable	6.46	4.92	58.138 *	.293
A student dies as a result of their involvement in criminal activity	5.71	4.26	32.439 *	.186

[a] Degrees of freedom 1, 142 for all death types. n = 144.

* $p < .001$

Values

The next question addressed the importance of specific values when making institutional decisions to sponsor a memorial. This question was also scored on a seven-point

Likert-type scale, ranging from “not important at all” to “extremely important.” This data is presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Important Values When Making Memorial Decisions

Value	*M* [a]	*n*	*SD*
Honoring the family’s wishes or requests	6.81	145	0.518
Providing closure for members of the institutional community	6.41	144	0.797
Respecting students' wishes or requests	6.41	144	0.904
Following best practices	5.91	142	1.184
Ensuring transparency	5.75	142	1.210
Providing a unique, personal memorial	5.56	143	1.527
Fostering social justice	5.43	142	1.365
Maintaining positive public relations	5.20	143	1.512
Maintaining uniformity	4.99	144	1.619
Avoiding potential legal liability	4.62	142	1.844

[a] Based on a seven-point Likert-type scale

As indicated in Table 11, the item that had both the highest rating and the lowest variance was “honoring the family’s wishes or requests” (*M* = 6.81, *n* = 145, *SD* = .518). “Respecting student’s wishes or requests” and “providing closure for the institutional community” both received ratings of 6.41, although providing closure had lower variance (*SD* = .904 and .797, respectively). Those three ratings were the only ones with means above the threshold of “somewhat important”; the median and the mode for these three items was also 7.0, the highest response possible of "extremely important.” The question about honoring the family’s wishes was also the only item for which no ratings under the midpoint were received. In other words, no one listed this item as “not important at all,” “not very important,” or “a little important.”

In addition, the value rating for “honoring the family’s wishes or requests” increased slightly when disaggregated between institutions who handle all student deaths in the same

manner (*M* = 6.70, *SD* = .735) and those who do not (*M* = 6.86, *SD* = .344). This finding was statistically significant and indicates that families have more influence at institutions that do not focus as much on uniformity (*F* = 15.449, p < .001).

Additional Findings

First, there was a marked difference between religiously-affiliated and non-religiously-affiliated institutions' likelihood of sponsoring a memorial for various types of student deaths. Respondents from religiously-affiliated institutions rated the likelihood that they would sponsor a memorial for almost every type of death higher than their non-religiously-affiliated counterparts. Unfortunately, none of these results indicated a statistically significant difference between groups. However, it is important to note that religiously-affiliated institutions scored more controversial types of death, particularly death by suicide, higher than non-religiously-affiliated institutions. The likelihood of a religiously-affiliated institution sponsoring a memorial for a student who died by suicide was 6.03 on a seven-point scale, while non-religiously affiliated institutions rated the likelihood with a score of 5.65.

Second, there was a consistent pattern between types of death and memorial services. For every type of death measured on the questionnaire, the likelihood of sponsoring a memorial was the highest when the expected memorial service was an individual service using the same format for all students. The likelihood of sponsoring a memorial decreased for all types of death when the anticipated service was a group memorial. Finally, the lowest likelihood of sponsoring a memorial occurred when the anticipated memorial service was an individualized, personal service. This data is presented in Table 12. However, the number of respondents who reported that their institutions sponsored individual, personalized services was almost five times higher than the number of respondents who reported that their institutions sponsored individual,

standardized services and more than double the number of respondents who reported that their institutions sponsored group services; this may have affected the means in each group.

Table 12

Difference in Likelihood that Institutions Would Sponsor a Memorial by Type of Death and Type of Memorial Service

Type of Death	Type of Memorial Service		
	Individual, Same Format (*n* = 15)	Group (*n* = 37)	Individual, Personalized (*n* = 80)
Multiple students die in one incident (e.g., an automobile accident)	6.60	6.46	6.19
A student dies in a highly publicized incident (e.g., major accident, mass shooting, natural disaster, terrorist attack)	6.60	6.41	6.13
A student dies as a result of a hate crime committed against them	6.64	6.43	6.11
A student dies from natural causes following a known illness	6.60	6.46	5.99
A student dies unexpectedly from natural causes	6.60	6.46	5.99
A student dies as a result of another person's criminal activity or negligence	6.33	6.24	5.96
A student dies from a drug or alcohol overdose	6.53	6.27	5.70
A student dies by suicide	6.40	6.24	5.62
A student dies in an incident for which the institution may be liable	6.29	6.00	5.54
A student dies as a result of their involvement in criminal activity	5.93	5.70	4.80

Differences Between Groups

This research question focused on whether there were differences in frequencies or significant differences between groups based on basic Carnegie classification, size, control, religious affiliation, number of student deaths per year, written memorial policy or practice, or institutional decision to memorialize all student deaths in the same manner that provide

additional insight into memorial practices. As I began to analyze this data, I ran a number of statistical tests, particularly analysis of variance (ANOVA), to explore significant differences between various institutional characteristics, policies and practices, the likelihood of sponsoring a memorial based on each student type and death type presented on the questionnaire, and the importance rating for each institutional value presented. I soon realized that analysis at this level confirmed significant differences between groups on almost every variable, often at the $p < .001$ level. However, I also recognized that while these differences were often significant, few were important. Most did not contribute to any deeper understanding of the subject matter than the descriptive data already provided throughout this chapter. As a result, I have not included these charts and tables in this analysis. I provide additional comments on this decision in the discussion chapter.

Responsibility

One other question was included on the questionnaire even though it did not apply directly to any of the research questions. Respondents were asked which office was primarily responsible for planning and implementing the memorial. Overwhelmingly, Student Affairs was listed as the responsible office ($n = 100$), following by the University Chaplain or Campus Ministry ($n = 14$). The majority of comments in response to the "other" option for this question also described the relationship between student affairs and campus ministry departments.

Additional Comments

At the end of the questionnaire, I asked respondents if there was anything else related to their memorial practice or policy that they would like to share, and I provided a free-form text field for them to record their response. I received five typed, single-spaced pages of comments to this question. I reviewed each of these comments and incorporated several of them in the results and discussion chapters. This helped me identify omissions or issues with the

questionnaire items, collect and share unanticipated data, provide additional clarity and context for participants' responses, and identify opportunities for future research.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided the descriptive data from each section of the questionnaire and additional statistical analysis that added meaning and context to institutional memorial decisions. I also used open-ended and free-text item responses to provide additional clarity and context information to these complicated situations. In the next chapter, I will use this data to discuss the major findings and implications for practitioners, as well as lessons learned and opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this final chapter, I focus on what I believe are the most important and interesting findings from this study. I discuss how these findings contribute new knowledge and insight to our understanding about institutional decisions to sponsor memorials for deceased college students. I also describe ways that this information can support and inform student affairs practice. By synthesizing data with existing literature and respondents' comments about their own institutional practices, I highlight some of the surprising and complex choices that must be made when responding to a student death. I also provide implications for student affairs professionals and identify topics for additional research.

Participation

There was a 14% response rate to this study. I believe this was an adequate sample to provide initial information on this topic. The majority of responses (*n* = 63) were from participants who identified their institutions as doctoral universities. As outlined in the results chapter, the proportion of doctoral institutions included in the sample was higher than the proportion of other institution types. I credit this higher response rate to two possible reasons. First, doctoral institutions have research at the heart of their campus identity and mission; it follows that professionals from those institutions would prioritize research requests. Second, and perhaps more likely, many, if not most, senior student affairs officers at doctoral institutions likely hold an earned doctorate themselves. Therefore, it is certainly possible that they were paying forward the assistance they received for their own doctoral research.

This higher representation of doctoral institutions must be acknowledged when interpreting the survey results, especially on items that are not disaggregated by institution type. This includes being particularly mindful that student affairs practitioners from master's universities, baccalaureate institutions, and associate's colleges have less presence in this study. Likewise, special focus institutions, tribal institutions, and for-profit institutions lacked sufficient representation to make any conclusions about if, how, and why these types of institutions sponsor memorials.

My advisor and I also received a personally surprising number of notes from invited participants. One explained how, after completing the survey, she had already added this topic to their next staff agenda. Another affirmed that this data is not widely available and would be quite helpful to the profession as a whole. I received 71 requests for the results of the study, an option I made available to all individuals who received a survey invitation. That was perhaps the clearest indicator that many student affairs professionals – even senior leaders in the field – care about and desire more information on this subject.

Institutional Memorial Practices

Almost 80% of respondents reported that their institutions "always" or "sometimes" sponsor memorials for deceased students, and just over 20% reported that their institutions never sponsor memorials. Since many institutions do sponsor memorials, there are ample opportunities to learn about memorial practices and to provide this information to practitioners to support, suggest, improve, and refine their institution's policies and practices. The 20% of respondents at institutions that never sponsor memorials also have important information to share about their institutional decisions, as demonstrated by their responses about why their institution has chosen to never sponsor memorials for deceased students and their survey comments.

I provided data on institutional sponsorship practice by institution type, size, control, religious affiliation, and approximate number of student deaths per year in Table 1. Through this disaggregation of data, one specific difference between associate's colleges and other institutions was immediately apparent. Over 50% of respondents from associate's colleges report that their institutions "never" sponsor memorials and only one associate's college reported that it "always" sponsors memorials. In contrast, 13.7% of respondents from doctoral institutions, 21.8% of respondents from master's universities, and 8.3% of respondents from baccalaureate colleges reported that their institutions "never" sponsor memorials for deceased students. When respondents from associate's colleges were asked why their institutions "never" sponsor memorials, over two-thirds (68.4%) indicated that their "student body is not residential or spread out among multiple campuses." Associate's colleges who "never" sponsor memorials also had the lowest percentage of respondents (22.2%) who stated that their institution "preferred to allow kinship groups to handle the ceremony," in contrast to the 50% of doctoral institutions that "never" sponsor memorials that also reported a preference for that option. These findings suggest that associate's colleges may face unique challenges, such as an often non-residential student body, a perceived lack of kinship groups among students, and the campus's physical size or use of satellite campuses, that complicate memorial sponsorship decisions at these institutions.

The percentage of respondents who reported that their institutions "always" sponsor memorials for deceased students increased with the approximate number of deaths that occur on their campus each year, with respondents from the six institutions that reported approximately 13 or more deaths each year also reporting that their institutions "always" sponsor memorials. On the other hand, respondents who reported that there were approximately three or fewer student deaths per year at their institutions were more evenly

distributed in their memorial practices, with roughly 30% of institutions always sponsoring memorials, 50% sometimes sponsoring memorials, and 20% never sponsoring memorials. Institutions that had approximately seven or more deaths per year were also more likely to have a written policy and were more likely to memorialize all deceased students in the same manner than institutions with approximately six or fewer deaths per year. In addition, once the approximate number of student deaths per year surpassed nine, all institutions reported memorializing all student deaths in the same manner. The interesting aspect of this data is that a higher average number of student deaths per year is associated with consistency, both by handling all student death in the same manner and, especially, "always" sponsoring memorials for deceased students.

None of these data suggest that institutions should take a specific approach to memorial sponsorship based on factors like Carnegie classification, size, control, religious affiliation, or approximate number of student deaths per year. It does, however, highlight that there are likely similar opportunities and challenges among institutions that share these characteristics. If these similarities are further explored, practitioners may learn new, improved, or different approaches that help them to better serve their campuses. In some cases, this might even include the possibility of discontinuing memorials at their institutions.

Family First

Colleges and universities have garnered a reputation in recent decades for being critical of parents (Gabriel, 2010; Joyce, 2014; Levine & Dean, 2012; Perlmutter, 2021), yet a student death puts the student's parents and family at the forefront of every decision. In this study, senior student affairs officers were asked how important it was to honor the family's wishes and requests using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from "not important to all" to "extremely important." The importance of honoring the family's wishes and requests (M = 6.81, SD = .518)

was the highest rated response in this section and in the two sections immediately preceding it, which also addressed questions of likelihood and used a similar integral scale. This item also had the lowest amount of variance for any score in these three sections. Just under 85% of respondents rated the value as "extremely important," and an additional 12% rated this value as "somewhat important." No respondents scored this variable with less than a neutral response; this was the only variable in the study for which this occurred. Also interesting is that the importance rating increased slightly when disaggregated between institutions who handle all student deaths in the same manner (M = 6.70, SD = .735) and those who do not (M = 6.86, SD = .344), a finding that was statistically significant (F = 15.449, $p < .001$) and indicates that families may have more influence at institutions that do not focus as much on uniformity.

Early in the questionnaire, I included an item about institutional objectives for a memorial. Knowing that I would ask about interactions with the deceased student's family later in the survey, I did not include anything about family in the section on institutional objectives. This turned out to be a significant omission on my part. Twenty of the participants provided an "other" response in this section that focused on assisting the student's family. They included statements indicating that one of their objectives was to "help the family cope with the loss" and to "support parents, siblings, and other family members." Others specified the objective of connecting with the student's family, specifically working to "engage family members with student friends, faculty, and classmates," or to "allow the family a time to return to campus to honor the student."

Additional comments throughout the remainder of the survey also supported the high rating and indicated how carefully and seriously institutions take the family's wishes and requests into consideration. Twenty-three of the respondents addressed the importance of honoring the family's decisions in their response to the final questionnaire item, in which

participants were asked if there was anything else they would like to share about their memorial process. One respondent stated:

> In all student death situations we let the family take the lead. We share with them ways that we have memorialized other students. We talk to the family about our need as a community to honor their student's life and to begin the healing process.

Another respondent stressed that the memorial "is very individualized and must be in concert with ... the wishes of the family of the deceased student. We do not act alone or of our own without a conversation with the family or guardian."

Several of the memorials that institutions sponsor also support the theme of respect for the family and the importance of honoring their requests and wishes. The memorial that institutions reported sponsoring most often was a posthumous degree or certificate of attendance, with 61.8% of institutions that always or sometimes sponsor memorials reporting this as part of their process. While not specifically stated, the intended recipients of such a document, based on standards of practice, would be the student's immediate next of kin. An additional 45.9% of respondents reported that they would recognize the deceased student at commencement or another institutional ceremony; some institutions allow a family member to participate in the ceremony and accept the degree on a student's behalf. This is also frequently depicted in online videos or news stories following a student death (for examples, see Campbell, 2017; Duran, 2022). A memorial service, whether an individual service or a group service, may include attendance or involvement of family, as does placing a physical memorial on campus. Establishing a scholarship or other fund likely includes the family in naming or determining the criteria for the award. In addition, 28% of respondents who sponsored memorials stated that they provide a gift or token to the student's family; another 22.3% reported that their college or university provides written or video messages to the student's family. Some respondents

specifically noted in this section that “any of those [memorials] may be possible, depending on the wishes of the family.” Another noted that “we have installed benches, held memorial services on campus, informed campus community members about off-campus memorial services, mentioned deceased students at convocation or baccalaureate, etc., based on the wishes of the family.”

When I asked the question about the importance of honoring the family’s wishes or requests, I intentionally included the word “requests” because my prior research suggested that the family’s requests were sometimes beyond what the institution felt was appropriate (Anderson, 2018). This idea appeared only once in this survey, when a respondent commented that “ongoing memorials and anniversary events are managed delicately balancing the wishes of the family, students, and campus community.” An opposing theme that did reappear, though, was that institutions “would forego any public recognition at the request of a family” or that “some families do not want any recognition by/in the university community and their wishes are the most important.” While the literature addressed streamlining administrative functions for family members (Callahan & Fox, 2008; McKusker & Witherow, 2012) and balancing transparency with the family’s right to privacy (Brennan, 2019), the repeated theme that the family’s wishes were most important never appeared in the literature at all. Had this idea surfaced in the literature or in my prior research, I would have included a specific question asking if the institution would sponsor a memorial if the deceased student’s family objected for any reason.

Student Requests

Akin to respecting the wishes and requests of the student’s family, respondents also rated the importance of respecting the wishes or requests of other students with one of the highest scores in that section of the questionnaire (M = 6.41, SD = .904). In addition, 42.9% of

respondents who stated their institution never sponsors memorials (*n* = 18) cited "prefer to allow kinship groups to handle the ceremony" as one reason they do not, emphasizing the important role that students play in memorial practices. One respondent noted that "often if an identifiable or defined group of students was especially close to the student (e.g., athletic team, residence hall, club/organization, major), we let the students influence and plan how they wish to see the student memorialized." Another explained that "there are also occasions, if initiated by students, when the University will support an immediate and less formal/uniform memorial for a loss that had significant and immediate impact." However, when compared to the data on respecting the family's wishes or request, it is unclear whether supporting students in their desire to honor their classmates plays as significant of a role. If a family asks an institution not to memorialize their student but their student peers request a memorial, how does the institution respond?

Providing Closure

The importance of providing closure for the community was rated as the second highest value in this survey (*M* = 6.41, *SD* = .797). This same theme also appeared in responses regarding the institution's objectives for the memorial, including "providing members of the campus community with an opportunity for formal mourning" (83.4%), "providing information about resources for distressed community members" (65.6%), and "disseminating information about the mourning process" (36.9%). These findings align with the literature that discusses ways institutions can use memorials to not only "bring the relationship with deceased students to a dignified close" (Cusick, 2008, p. 551), but also respond to the emotional needs of the campus (Taub & Servaty-Seib, 2008; Zinner, 1985b).

This response was also a positive indicator of the importance institutions placed on helping campus community members grieve the loss of a student or classmate (Anderson, 2018;

Balk, 2001, 2008; Borzumato-Gainey & Noyes, 2014; Callahan & Fox, 2008; Cusick, 2008; Taub & Servaty-Seib, 2008). This is particularly important for institutions since grief can have a profound effect on retention and graduation (Balk, 2001). There is no concrete evidence of the degree to which memorials help students and other members of the campus community assuage and negotiate grief. However, evidence from grief studies can confidently be extended to support the claim that certain practices, such as memorials, do provide helpful, healing interventions for most grieving individuals (Doka, 2002; Frew & Forsdike, 2022; Hawdon, 2009; Hoy, 2013; Kollar, 1990; McCusker & Witherow, 2012; Rando, 1993; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998; Turner, 1969; Worden, 2009). Unfortunately, the importance of helping resolve the community's grief may be overlooked if the deceased student's family requests that the institution not hold a memorial for their student or if the institution decides not to sponsor a memorial for a specific student for any of the reasons cited in this study.

Difficult Decisions

Despite the need and desire to provide closure for members of the college or university community, institutional concerns about the way a student died may trump that value. When the likelihood of sponsoring a memorial for students who died "as a result of their involvement in criminal activity" or who died "in an incident for which the institution may be held liable" were calculated, these two variables had the lowest likelihood ratings for this question, with means of 4.89 and 5.60 respectively. This data is presented in Table 9. The crosstabulation of these variables with institutional sponsorship practices in Table 10 further demonstrates that even institutions that "always" sponsor memorials for deceased students are less likely to sponsor memorials when students die under these two circumstances. Table 10 also illustrates which students would be less likely to have a sponsored memorial at institutions that "sometimes" memorialize deceased students. Again, "involvement in criminal activity" or in an

"incident for which the institution may be liable" received the lowest ratings (*M* = 4.61 and *M* = 4.92).

Even respondents whose institutions sponsor group memorials for all students who died within a particular time frame report a decreased likelihood that these two groups of students would not be included in that memorial ("Involvement in criminal activity," *M* = 5.70 and "incident for which the institution may be liable," *M* = 6.00). The same is true of institutions that report sponsoring individual memorials for all students using the same format, ("Involvement in criminal activity," *M* = 5.93 and "incident for which the institution may be liable," *M* = 6.29). However, for institutions that sponsor individual, personalized memorials for each deceased student, the likelihood that they would sponsor a memorial for a student who "dies as a result of their involvement in criminal activity" drops to the lowest score among these variables, 4.80, and sponsorship for a student who "dies in an incident for which the institution may be liable" drops to 5.54.

These two types of death both suggest that the deceased student was engaged in behavior that was inappropriate and illegal. This may be why institutions are reluctant to acknowledge the death or suggest that they are honoring the student in any way. Even this, though, is complicated. One respondent recounted how two students died in an automobile collision with a car driven by a community member. The student who was driving the car was initially determined to be at fault. After an investigation, it was determined that the driver of the other car was responsible. In my own professional practice, there have been two separate instances in which students died in single-car accidents that were initially classified as accidental, but which we later learned were the result of driving under the influence and excessive speeding. In these situations, does an institution immediately hold a memorial to promote closure for the community, err on the side of caution and wait for the results of an

investigation, or do nothing at all? And what action should be taken when two or more students die in the same incident – for instance, an automobile accident – in which one student was involved in illegal activity and the other was a victim? In these situations, a perceived institutional need to discourage similar behavior may cause the mistake or decision that led to a student's death to take precedence over appreciating other aspects of the student's life. And yet, when a student dies as a result of their participation in serious criminal activity, including assault, gang activity, kidnapping, or murder, it follows that the institution must not hold any sort of remembrance.

Two more murky areas arise when comparing types of memorials with types of death: a student who dies from a drug or alcohol overdose and a student who dies by suicide. The latter, in particular, has received considerable attention in the literature; in recent years, views of suicide as a sinful, selfish, or attention-seeking act have shifted to regarding death by suicide as a mental health issue (Balk, 2011; Brown, 2014; CDC, 2001; Corazzini & May, 1985; Currier et al., 2008; Levine, 2008; Lipka, 2010; Neimeyer et al., 2008; Parrish & Tunkle, 2005; Philip, 1990; Rickgarn, 1994; Tallman, 2006; Walker, 2016; Westefeld et al, 2006). Likewise, views on drug or alcohol abuse have shifted from a personal decision and a lack of willpower to a medical model of addiction (Frank & Nagel, 2017). Nonetheless, or perhaps because of this, these two areas remain problematic for institutions. Several comments acknowledged a concern about suicide contagion or that sponsoring a memorial would be interpreted as celebrating the student's choice to end their life. For institutions that reported that they sponsor individual, personalized memorials for deceased students, the likelihood that they would sponsor a memorial for a student who died by suicide was 5.63 on a seven-point scale, compared to a mean likeliness score of 6.24 for institutions that hold group memorials for all students who died within a certain time frame. For students who died as a result of a drug or alcohol overdose, the

likelihood that an institution that sponsors individual, personalized memorials would sponsor a memorial was 5.70 on a seven-point scale, compared to a mean likeliness score of 6.27 for institutions that sponsor group memorials. Because both suicide and alcohol and drug use have religious and moral overtones, it was also interesting that institutions with religious affiliations indicated a greater likelihood that they would sponsor a memorial for these students than non-religiously-affiliated institutions, although the difference between groups was not statistically significant.

Uniformity and Personalization

The two most reported reasons that institutions that did not sponsor memorials chose not to do so were "difficulty treating all students the same" (69.0%, *n* = 29) and "difficulty creating a memorial that is appropriate for all deceased students" (61.9%, *n* = 26). However, when institutions that always or sometimes sponsor memorials were asked to rate the importance of "providing a unique, personal memorial" and the importance of "maintaining uniformity," both scores were within the lower half of factors considered important (*M* = 5.56 and *M* = 4.99, respectively). In fact, only "avoiding potential legal liability" (*M* = 4.60) scored lower than "maintaining uniformity." This creates an interesting paradox in that institutions that do not sponsor memorials report that they do not do so because it is difficult to treat everyone the same, yet institutions that do sponsor memorials do not place as much importance on uniformity as other values. Initially, this suggests that perhaps embracing personalization allows institutions more freedom when they decide to sponsor or not sponsor a memorial.

While 52.2% of institutions reported sponsoring individual memorials, personalized for each student, only 24.8% reported sponsoring "group memorials for all students who died within a particular time frame," and 10.2% reported sponsoring "individual memorials using the same format for all students." While the literature tends to highlight group memorials and

praises the tradition and symbolism they often evoke (Boone, 2009; Brennan, 2019; Hamilton, 2008; Paine, 2007), this data suggests that more institutions favor a personal, individual ceremony tailored specifically to the student. This format would also make it easier to achieve one of the highest rated objectives for the memorial: "establishing that the deceased student was a valued member of the campus community" (73.2%, *n* = 115).

The institutional decision to handle every student death in the same manner suggests something else about uniformity. As illustrated in Table 4, senior student affairs officers from 80.8% of the institutions that reported that they memorialize "all student deaths in the same manner" also reported that they "always" sponsor a memorial for deceased students. However, the remaining 19.2% reported that they handle "all student deaths in the same manner" but conflictingly also state that they only "sometimes" sponsor memorials. This suggests that even when institutions report the highest standard of uniformity, they still approach memorials differently.

This finding was strengthened by the extent that respondents commented on handling student deaths on a case-by-case basis or that there is no "one size fits all" approach. The data on the likelihood that institutions would hold memorials for specific types of students also illustrated these differences. Respondents gave the highest rating, 6.35 on a seven-point scale, to a well-known student, such as an athlete, student leader, or online influencer, while indicating that the likelihood of sponsoring a memorial for a comparatively unknown student was only 5.83. One respondent aptly summarized this difference by noting that "the more popular an individual, the more recognition." Deceased students who were likely less engaged with the campus, either through physical presence or enrollment goals, had the lowest likelihood of a memorial, with a part-time student at 5.55, a fully-online student at 4.92, and a non-degree seeking student at 4.48, all on a seven-point scale. These three categories also had

the greatest amount of variance in responses for all student types, illustrating less consistency in how memorials for these types of students are handled. One comment in particular summarized this disparity as well as a desire to change it:

> The sad thing is that we do not have a "practice" or standard procedure. Now I want to ensure that we have a policy/procedure. It depends upon who the student is and what relationship they have with people on campus as to whether, first of all, someone knows something tragic has happened and if we will do anything about it. Doesn't seem fair when we consider ourselves a "family" and a community of learners. Hence, having something in place would be important. How the reflection looks can be based upon the individual and their relationships but an acknowledgement in anyone's passing is important.

The Easiest Option?

Awarding a posthumous degree or certificate of attendance was one of the most-cited memorial practice in the study (61.8%, *n* =97). This was particularly interesting to me for several reasons, most of which likely match the reasons this is such a common choice for institutions. First, this memorial requires nothing more than purchasing or printing a diploma or certificate and delivering it to the deceased student's next of kin. It acknowledges a student's membership in the college or university community, and it requires minimal resources, time, and expense. This type of recognition is appropriate for all students, even those who were attending classes but were not degree-seeking students. It is also versatile. Diplomas or certificates of attendance can be presented to a deceased student's immediate family privately or as part of a ceremony or event. This option provides institutions with one way to consistently recognize all deceased students. The diploma is the quintessential symbol of students' academic accomplishments and

the completion of their student experience. It follows that it would symbolize the same level of completion or closure when issued for a deceased student.

The value and purpose of a posthumous degree are symbolic. Neither a deceased student nor a student's family can use a posthumous degree for personal or professional benefit. Presenting it to a family, especially if requested, is simply an act of kindness and affirmation. However, a posthumous degree is also the one memorial that is consistently codified by university-wide policy and regulated by the faculty. For them, the posthumous degree also serves as a symbol of accomplishment and merit. Numerous responses to questionnaire items about memorials referenced requirements for a posthumous degree, such as the respondent being in their last semester of enrollment or posthumous degrees only being awarded to students who had completed a specific number of hours. For this reason, a certificate of attendance may be a more flexible option for institutions that want to recognize students in this manner but whose faculty limit posthumous degrees to certain students. Certificates of attendance may be designed to look exactly like a diploma with minor changes in language.

Public Perception

Colleges and universities, like any organization, are often judged more by public perception than by actual outcomes. That perception, sometimes advanced by news reports or social media, can affect the institution's admissions, enrollment, funding, and donations.

The three types of death that were most likely to be memorialized by an institution were the three that would likely draw the most empathetic public attention: "multiple student deaths in one incident" (M = 6.26, N = 143); a student death "in a highly publicized incident such as an accident, mass shooting, natural disaster, or terrorist attack" (M = 6.18, N = 143); and a student death "as a result of a hate crime committed against the student" (M = 6.14, N = 141).

In each of these circumstances, it would also be likely that the deceased student would be heralded as a model student and praised for their contributions, and that mourners might lament the goals the deceased student would never attain. Conversely, as described earlier, the two types of death that would generally draw the most negative public attention had the lowest likelihood of having a memorial: a student who "dies as a result of their involvement in criminal activity" and a death "for which the institution might be liable." At the same time, institutions report that "maintaining positive public relations" and "avoiding potential legal liability" are among the least important values when sponsoring a memorial (M = 5.20 and M = 4.62, respectively).

It would be careless to suggest that the reality of public perception following a student death does not or should not enter into consideration at a senior administrative level. Senior administrators have the responsibility to not only protect and support students, but to also protect the image and brand of the institution. This means that administrators must be careful about how their actions following a student death might be viewed by the public at large. During this time, an institution's public affairs department may take steps, for example, to minimize a student's membership in their campus community when that student is accused of a serious crime or shift responsibility for a hazing incident to the fraternity where it occurred.

Planning Ahead

When data on whether an institution had a written memorial policy or practice and whether an institution handled all student deaths in the same manner was analyzed against the likelihood that an institution would sponsor a memorial for specific types of students and following certain types of death, there was a significant difference between groups in every circumstance at the $p < .001$ level (see Table 8 and Table 10). In other words, the institutions that had "a written policy or practice" made decisions about memorials differently than

institutions that did not. The same was true with institutions that had made the decision to memorialize “all students in the same manner” and those who had not. Further, institutions with “a written policy or practice” were more likely to “always” sponsor a memorial and institutions that decide to handle “all student deaths in the same manner” were four times as likely to “always” sponsor a memorial for students (see Table 4). This suggests that advance decision making leads to more consistent practice.

There are, however, some limitations to this data. First, I included the “written policy or practice” item on the questionnaire because I had hardly seen any policies or practices on sponsoring memorials while completing my literature review and prior research. In fact, the first policy I found that referenced memorials stated that the institution would not endorse an individual memorial in any situation (Appalachian State University, n.d.). On the other hand, numerous institutions did have written student death policies or practices, most of which say little or nothing about a memorial; links to several of these plans are included in Appendix A. It was unclear to me if participants were making a distinction between the student death policy, focused predominately on notification and records, and a memorial when answering this question. If I tested this item again, I would make this distinction more explicit. Second, 19.2% of respondents from institutions that reported memorializing “all student deaths in the same manner” also stated that they “sometimes“ sponsor memorials for deceased students, indicating inconsistency in roughly one-fifth of these responses.

Implications

Death is messy and unpredictable, emotional and complicated. Student deaths are an inevitable reality for student affairs professionals and administrators, who must be ready to respond to student deaths in caring, intentional, and organized ways. The information collected

through this study describes *common* practices for institutional memorials to help practitioners prepare for this eventuality on their campuses.

I stress the word "common" in this discussion because the often-used term "best practice" inherently suggests that some institutional memorial practices are better than others. There *are* established practices from multiple fields that promote and facilitate grief, mourning, and bereavement, and research in these disciplines demonstrates that some practices are more helpful than others (Balk, 2001, 2008; Doka, 2002; Frew & Forsdike, 2022; Hawdon, 2009; Hoy, 2013; Kollar, 1990; McCusker & Witherow, 2012; Rando, 1993; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998; Turner, 1969; Worden, 2009). However, the determination of whether or not a memorial meets the needs of an institutional community can only be made by the members of that community. Consistent with the finding that there is no "one size fits all" memorial practice, what is most helpful for one institution may not be helpful for another. Student affairs professionals and other institutional leaders have an obligation to ensure that their practice is the most helpful practice for their community and that it does no harm. Giving practitioners more holistic information about memorials and giving them the opportunity to compare and contrast their policies, practices, and traditions with those at other institutions will help them assess their practices and consider opportunities for improvement.

Through this initial study, we have identified that almost 80% of institutions always or sometimes memorialize students, that the most frequently used memorials are memorial services and posthumous degrees or certificates of attendance, and that associate's colleges struggle the most with creating or implementing memorials that support their unique environments. We also better understand a dichotomy about uniformity: some institutions do not sponsor memorials because they cannot provide uniformity, and those that sponsor memorials do not find uniformity especially important. Being too uniform and too rigid might

not be the best solution for some campuses, especially when uniformity conflicts with institutional values like “honoring the family’s wishes and requests,” “providing closure,” and “providing a unique, personal memorial.”

Each student death is different and “each death is going to present its own unique problems” (Stephenson, 1985, p. 11). In this study, I used various student types and death types to illustrate how the likelihood of sponsoring a memorial can change depending on these variables. Student affairs administrators should review questions similar to the ones posed in this study, consider what may or may not be appropriate for their campus, and evaluate why they chose that option. While there is no “one size fits all” approach to student death and student memorials, and while it would be simplistic to suggest that any of these factors might appear in isolation, asking these questions will help practitioners be more prepared when more complex student deaths occur at their institutions. Practitioners should also reflect on the unintentional messages their practice sends to students, families, and their campus community about the value of a student and the values the institution holds (Callahan & Fox, 2008).

Many senior student affairs officers who participated in this study reported that their institutions have “a written policy or practice” for sponsoring memorials. Others have made an advance decision to handle “all student deaths in the same manner.” Since memorial decisions are typically urgent and occur in emotionally charged environments (Callahan & Fox, 2008; Zinner, 1995b), student affairs practitioners benefit from having conversations about the most difficult parts of handling a student death before their next student dies. If appropriate for their institution, they should also add these decisions to their policy documents and make them available to the campus community to increase transparency and foster accountability any time a student death occurs.

We should also be aware that we might need to change institutional policies as our world changes, particularly in light of changing cultural norms and increased understanding about certain aspects of mental health. Changes in leadership can also be the impetus for change, as new administrators often bring fresh ideas and new traditions to an institution. We should also be cognizant of changes in the types of students and families that our institutions serve. For example, an increase in students from a particular country or non-dominant religious group may require campus leaders to respond to student deaths in a different way than they previously responded.

This study also demonstrated that there are many ways to memorialize a deceased student. Almost 75% of respondents reported that their institution sponsors some form of memorial service, and over 60% reported that their institution provides the deceased student's family with a posthumous diploma or certificate of attendance. Recognition at commencement or other ceremonies, establishment of a scholarship, and physical memorials like a garden, bench, or plaque were repeatedly cited as common practices. Respondents' comments also provided other examples of memorials that were appropriate for their institutions, their mission, and their students. These included a memorial exhibition of a deceased student's art, recognition of athletes at an athletic event, creating an award named for a deceased student, presenting a campus flag to the deceased's next of kin, or holding a day of remembrance in conjunction with a day of service.

Finally, I would encourage campus leadership, regional and national student affairs organizations, and broadly-focused higher education organizations to help this effort by offering workshops on student death, providing case studies of particularly difficult student death incidents and response, or on the ethical, legal, and public affairs issues involved in responding to student deaths. Practitioners should also include student death as part of their annual

disaster and crisis training. These opportunities can help busy administrators prepare by giving them a specific time to plan and to consider the actions they would want to take if called upon following various types of student death.

Lessons Learned

Because very little is known about this subject, I began with dozens of questions about institutional practices, institutional decisions, and factors I wanted to study. Even after paring down those questions to the ones ultimately included in the research questions and their counterparts on the final version of the questionnaire, the resulting number of variables and the amount of data collected was overwhelming. That became a limitation of its own, as there came a point in my analysis when I discovered that significance was not creating greater understanding of the issues. Therefore, in reporting the results of this study, I have included those tests that proved to be most salient to the findings, opting to err on the side of applicability over abundance.

Based on what I learned from respondents' answers and feedback, I would structure some questions and items differently if I conducted the study again. The first omission was not including support for the deceased student's family as an institutional memorial objective. I would also add questions about the weight of the family's wishes when directly compared to other aspects of memorials, such as the importance of students' desire to have a memorial or the importance of providing closure for the campus community. I would also handle the departure from usual practice questions differently, as the data obtained did not effectively differentiate whether the departure was a positive or negative change. Many respondents also skipped these questions; I suspect this was either because they were not clearly presented depending on the device they used to complete the survey or because the content was confusing. Both of those issues would need to be addressed if I used those questions again.

I carefully considered aspects of the survey that might have decreased the response rate, as lower response rates provide a less complete picture of the research subject. I used the recorded amount of time that most respondents took to complete the survey to verify that I had been accurate and honest when providing information about survey length in the invitation to participate. I also recognize that, by limiting the survey to senior student affairs officers, I may have inadvertently discouraged participation. Senior student affairs officers typically carry large portfolios and have many demands on their time. Allowing them to forward the study to others would have likely increased the response rate, but I believe this might have compromised the responses since many could have been submitted by staff members, e.g., event planners or chaplains, who may know very little about student affairs.

The timing of the survey may have also resulted in fewer responses. Because the participants were all senior student affairs officers and were most likely twelve-month employees at their respective institutions, my original goal was to release the survey on December 12, 2022. I picked this date with the hope that the period between the end of the Fall semester and the beginning of the winter break would provide some additional time for individuals who, on most weeks, would often be too busy to complete a survey. Due to a delay in review and in obtaining a not human subject research declaration from the University of Georgia Human Subjects Research Office, the survey was not released until Monday, January 24, 2023. This coincided with the start of the Spring semester at many colleges and universities across the United States, and which, anecdotally, is a much busier time for senior student affairs' officers than the period of time prior to winter holiday closures.

This study relied solely on the perspective of senior student affairs officers, who are upper-level campus administrators. Students, staff, faculty, and families may all have very different opinions of what is important when memorializing a deceased student and varying

views on how memorial decisions should be made. While I believe that I made the right decision about my sample, I do wish that I had included a question about the number of years respondents had served in the profession. This would have given me the opportunity to test whether there is a relationship between years of experience and views on matters such as suicide contagion or alcohol addiction as a medical condition (Frank & Nagel, 2017).

Finally, this study creates a more complete picture of common practice. I describe memorial decisions based on what is or what might be, but I do not make judgements or recommendations on which practices are most helpful or most effective. I do not dictate the decisions practitioners should make for their institutions or even recommend preferred practices, because there is no "one size fits all" approach to memorials following a student death.

Suggestions for Future Research

I still have many unanswered questions about memorials that I hope are the subject of future research. The vast number of student types and types of death provide dozens of additional variables for research using similar methodologies. For example, early versions of my questionnaire included questions about dual enrollment students, international students, and students who were no longer enrolled due to an extended illness that led to their eventual death. I drafted questions about how institutions would respond when students died in military service for the United States or in military service for other countries. I would also like to know more about how trauma effects student memorials, as the literature suggests that more traumatic deaths have greater impact, particularly among secondary and tertiary survivors (Hawdon, 2009; Hawdon & Ryan, 2011; Zinner, 1985b). I also wanted to explore how administrators might handle a memorial when they only learn of a death weeks after it occurred, when the death occurs during summer break, when the student recently graduated,

or when the student is away on an internship or study abroad experience. I also identified other values, such as creating or continuing campus traditions and honoring significant anniversary events, that could have been included as response options. A more detailed understanding of which offices and departments are typically involved in an institution's memorial efforts, as well as what their responsibilities are, could also provide models and approaches to better inform campus planning. I also recommend collecting information on other institutional characteristics, such as which responses are from administrators at historically Black colleges and universities or Hispanic serving institutions. In addition, I believe future researchers need to ensure that voices that are not as well-represented in this study, such as associate's colleges, are included and heard.

Based on the findings, I believe there is still much to learn about the role of a deceased student's family in institutional memorial decisions. This includes how a family's request not to memorialize a deceased student effects remembrance and closure events for members of the campus community and whether or not that request is disclosed to the campus. There is also much to learn about the types of requests made by families and which are honored by the institutions their students attended, particularly those that extend beyond an expected mourning period (Anderson, 2018). Because these situations are often complex, multifaceted, and emotionally charged, this would be an excellent topic for a qualitative study. Researchers could conduct interviews with participants to explore such situations in depth. Case studies could also provide valuable insight into how practitioners have handled these types of difficult situations.

Some respondents remarked that they have some form of permanent memorial on their campus that honors deceased students, often in the form of a monument, garden, or reflection space. This also was a recurring theme in the literature (Boone, 2009; Brennan, 2019; Ezarik,

2017; Foote, 2003; Hamilton, 2008; Paine, 2007), as were monuments for mass tragedy events such as the Texas A&M bonfire or the plane crash that took the lives of the Marshal University football team. However, it is unclear how common such memorials are, particularly those that recognize all deceased students. Another feature of physical memorials worth investigating in future studies is whether or not individual student names are listed and under what conditions, as well as if a campus policy guides these decisions. This research could be completed as a quantitative study, or data could be collected through document or photo analysis.

Several respondent comments on the questionnaire referenced the difficulty of finding an appropriate response to suicide and concerns about suicide contagion (CDC, 2001; Levine, 2008; Neimeyer et al, 2008; Parrish & Tunkle, 2005; Philip, 1990). Additional research on this topic, which likely already exists in other disciplines, would be an excellent source of direction for administrators struggling with this question. It would also be interesting to determine if there are common characteristics between administrators who have certain views about suicide and suicide contagion, particularly related to age, years of service in student affairs administration, and any other professional field with which they are affiliated. Again, a researcher could design a quantitative study to gather this information from a large sample.

We also need to learn how to assess student perception of campus memorial practices, particularly on an institutional level. This includes the amount of input students have in the process of establishing, organizing, and determining the manner in which memorials for deceased students are offered. This understanding will help us identify which practices are most helpful in specific environments and through which programs students and community members experience the most closure. While taking all possible steps to protect individuals from harm or additional trauma, interviewing surviving students, including both primary and

tertiary survivors, as part of a qualitative research study would provide a wealth of information to practitioners making decisions in similar environments.

Finally, this study identified factors that make some deaths different than others. A more focused study on when institutions need to make exceptions to their memorial policies or practices and why they believe these changes are necessary will provide additional guidance for student affairs professionals who face difficult decisions following especially complex student deaths. If confidentiality for all parties can be assured, case studies detailing these decisions would be an excellent teaching and professional development tool for practitioners.

Conclusion

When a college or university student dies, student affairs professionals are often responsible for coordinating their institution's response. They are also typically intimately involved with the deceased student's family and mourning campus community members. They are responsible for ensuring specific administrative processes are completed, providing emotional support for the campus community, and sponsoring memorials that facilitate formal mourning. This last responsibility has received little attention in the student affairs literature. Through this study, I sought to learn more about the types of memorials institutions sponsor, why institutions made the decision to sponsor or not sponsor memorials, and whether student type, type of death, or institutional values effect the likelihood that an institution would sponsor a memorial for a deceased student. Using a questionnaire distributed to senior student affairs officers across the United States, I collected data to answer these questions. I also asked respondents to add anything else they wanted to share about their institution's memorial practices. From these responses, we now have initial answers to some of these questions. Of course, there is still much more to learn, but this beginning will hopefully give student affairs professionals a foundation on which to build and lead to additional research and understanding.

In closing, there was one theme that was clear throughout this research. When a student dies, student affairs professionals want to do something and they want to do it well. Though never welcomed or desired, a student death can bring out the very best in a campus community through the often unseen efforts of dedicated leaders who support the deceased student's family, grieving community members, and one another. My sincere hope in conducting this study and sharing the results is that this information will help professionals prepare for this eventuality, review and refine memorial practices on their own campuses, and, consequently, better serve and support their students, their families, and their campus communities when a student dies.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE STUDENT DEATH POLICIES

The following list includes a variety of student death policies located using internet searches for "college student death policy" and "college student death protocol." Each of these links were active as of October 1, 2022. Archived copies of the websites are available from the author.

Albany State University

https://www.asurams.edu/docs/legal-affairs/policies/Death-of-a-Student-Policy.pdf

Algonquin College

https://www.algonquincollege.com/policies/files/2019/04/SA04.pdf

Amarillo College

https://www.actx.edu/hr/student-death-policy

Appalachian State University

http://policy.appstate.edu/images/b/bc/Student-Death-Protocol.pdf

California State Polytechnic University Pomona

https://www.cpp.edu/deanofstudents/protocols/death-protocol.shtml

City University of New York

https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/student-affairs/policies/StudentDeathProtocol.pdf

Clarion University

https://clarion.edu/about-clarion/policies/cu-policies/responding-to-student-death-policy.pdf

Clemson University

https://www.clemson.edu/studentaffairs/advocacy-success/studentdeath.html

Elgin Community College

https://elgin.edu/about-ecc/administration/procedures/death-of-student-policy/

Florida Atlantic University

https://www.fau.edu/dean/pdf/Deceased%20Student%20Protocol.pdf

https://www.fau.edu/dean/pdf/Deceased%20Student%20Flowchart.pdf

Foothill College

https://foothill.edu/studentaffairs/student-death-protocol.html

Fort Valley State University

https://www.fvsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Death-Among-Members-of-the-University-Community-Protocol.pdf

Georgia Institute of Technology

https://specialevents.gatech.edu/wtwb

Gwinnett Technical College

https://www.gwinnetttech.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/6.3.3-GT-Student-Death-Procedure-and-Protocol.pdf

Indiana University Purdue University-Indianapolis

https://facultycouncil.iupui.edu/FCContent/Html/Media/FCContent/documents/policies/Student%20Policies/student_death_notification_protocol_September2017.pdf

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

http://inside.jjay.cuny.edu/compendium/assets/PDFs/BIT.002%20-%20Protocol%20on%20Responding%20to%20the%20Death%20of%20a%20Student.pdf

Middle Georgia State University

https://policies.mga.edu/policy-manual/section-4-student-affairs/4-1-student-handbook-code-of-conduct/4-1-6-policies-related-to-students/4-1-6-8-deceased-student-policy.php

Minnesota State Community and Technical College

https://www.minnesota.edu/about/policies-and-procedures/student-death-protocol-and-procedure

Minnesota State University Moorhead

https://www.mnstate.edu/about/policies-procedures/procedures/student-death/

New Jersey City University

https://www.njcu.edu/about/njcu-policies-and-procedures/university-policy-library/student-services-and-responsibilities-policies/protocol-death-student

Oakland University

https://wwwp.oakland.edu/policies/generalgovernance/423/

Ohio University

https://www.ohio.edu/policy/20-001.html

Ramapo College of New Jersey

https://www.ramapo.edu/policies/policy/memorial/

Sacramento State University

https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/_internal/_documents/vp-procedures-related-to-student-death.pdf

Stanford University

https://orsl.stanford.edu/who-we-are/events-services/memorial-services

Texas A&M University

https://studentlife.tamu.edu/sas/silvertaps/

University of Alabama at Birmingham

https://www.uab.edu/redfolder/student-death-protocol

University of Arkansas Little Rock

http://ualr.edu/policy/home/student/student-death-protocol/

University of Buffalo

https://www.buffalo.edu/studentlife/life-on-campus/clubs-and-activities/event-calendars/ceremonies-and-celebrations/student-remembrance-ceremony.html

University of California Davis

https://studentaffairs.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk486/files/inline-files/VCSA–Postvention2019_0.pdf

University of California Los Angeles

http://www.adminpolicies.ucla.edu/pdf/160.pdf

http://www.adminpolicies.ucla.edu/pdf/160-1.pdf

http://www.adminpolicies.ucla.edu/pdf/160-2.pdf

http://www.adminpolicies.ucla.edu/pdf/115-1.pdf

University of California San Diego

https://adminrecords.ucsd.edu/ppm/docs/160-6.html

University of Colorado Denver

https://www.ucdenver.edu/docs/librariesprovider284/default-document-library/7000-student-affairs/7027---university-response-following-a-student-death.pdf?sfvrsn=3ce4ccba_2

University of Hawaii Hilo

https://hilo.hawaii.edu/studentaffairs/studentdeathprotocol/

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

https://ahs.illinois.edu/death-announcement

University of Minnesota Moorhead

https://www.mnstate.edu/about/policies-procedures/procedures/student-death/

University of Missouri St. Louis

https://www.umsl.edu/studentlife/dsa/parentresources1/death-of-a-student-protocol.html

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

https://dos.unc.edu/about-us/policies-standards-and-procedures/student-death-protocol/

University of North Carolina at Pembroke

https://www.uncp.edu/campus-life/student-affairs/policies-regulations-and-student-handbook

University of North Carolina Charlotte

https://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/up-404

University of North Carolina Greensboro

https://sa.uncg.edu/dean/policy/crisis-management-protocol/

University of North Texas

https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/dean-of-students/resources/fallen-eagles

University of Washington

https://dsl.uw.edu/about/deceased-student-notices/

University of Wisconsin Madison

https://doso.students.wisc.edu/guide/student-death/

University of Wisconsin Whitewater

https://www.uww.edu/student-handbook/policies-student-death

Utah Valley University

https://www.uvu.edu/studentlife/student-death-protocol/index.html

Wayne State University

http://policies.wayne.edu/appm/10-9-student-death-procedures.php

Wichita State University

https://www.wichita.edu/services/careteam/assets/docs/deceased-student-protocol.php

APPENDIX B

CONTENT VALIDITY FEEDBACK FORM

This email and feedback form, along with the research questions and a copy of the questionnaire, were distributed to five student affairs administrators to evaluate the content validity of the questionnaire.

Dear [FirstName],

Thank you for helping me prepare the questionnaire for my research on institutional decisions to sponsor memorials for deceased college students. My research questions, the draft invitation to participate, and the draft questionnaire are attached, along with a form to provide feedback on the survey questions.

aka

Institutional Decisions to Sponsor Memorials for Deceased College Students

Please circle your responses to each question on the chart below, and include any related notes or comments in the space under each question. Each item corresponds to a question heading on the attached questionnaire draft. A “T” in the question number indicates text only; a “Q” indicates a question and response.

	Does this item answer or contribute to the answer of a research question?	Should this item remain on the questionnaire?	Should there be any changes to the wording or response options?
01T Informed Consent	----	Yes No	Yes No
02Q SSAO	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
03T Not SSAO	----	Yes No	Yes No
04T Definitions	----	Yes No	Yes No
05Q Sponsorship	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
06Q Never Sponsor Memorials	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
07Q Written Policy	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No

	Does this item answer or contribute to the answer of a research question?	Should this item remain on the questionnaire?	Should there be any changes to the wording or response options?
08Q All the Same	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
09Q Memorials Types	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
10Q Objectives	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
11Q Student Type	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
11Q Student Type	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
12Q Type of Death	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
13Q Values	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
14Q Other Aspects	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
15Q Responsible Dept	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No

	Does this item answer or contribute to the answer of a research question?	Should this item remain on the questionnaire?	Should there be any changes to the wording or response options?
16Q Classification	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
17Q Size	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
18Q Control	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
19Q Religious Affiliation	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
20Q Number of Deaths	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No
21T End of Survey	Yes No	Yes No	Yes No

APPENDIX C

INVTATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Subject: Memorials for Deceased College Students

[Prefix] [FirstName] [LastName]

[Title]

[Institution]

Dear [Prefix] [LastName],

One of the most difficult and complicated situations a student affairs professional faces is the death of a student. Many publications provide detailed administrative checklists to guide professionals' actions after a student death; however, there is little published research on the variety of memorials that often follow.

As the senior student affairs officer at your institution, I would like to invite you to complete a survey [embedded link] to help identify:

- the reasons why institutions sponsor – or do not sponsor – memorials following a student death,
- the types of memorials that institutions sponsor,
- the extent to which student type and the circumstances of a student's death may impact an institution's memorial decisions, and

- the institutional values that are most important when planning a memorial.

The survey will take approximately 7-8 minutes to complete, depending on your responses. Because responses are based on your professional experience and an understanding of campus-wide issues that affect memorial decisions, please do not forward this survey to another staff member.

This study is the basis for my dissertation for the College Student Affairs Administration doctoral program at the University of Georgia and is conducted under the direction of Dr. Merrily Dunn (merrily@uga.edu). The risks to participating in this study are no more than you would encounter in everyday professional life. You can choose not to respond to any question or to stop at any time. Your responses will be anonymized and will not be linked to you or your institution. After reviewing the survey content, the University of Georgia Human Subjects Office determined that this activity is not designed as human subjects research and, therefore, no IRB approval was required. My advisor and I are both glad to answer any questions or respond to any concerns that you have.

If you would like to receive the results of this study, please provide an email address on this form [embedded link], which is not linked to the survey or to your responses. Your request to receive these results does not imply or require participation in the study. To facilitate broad dissemination of this information and to provide the most benefit for participants and other interested parties, the data collected will be released later this semester.

Many thanks in advance for your assistance with this research and for supporting the professional development of individuals in our field.

Click here to begin [embedded link].

A. Kay Anderson

Doctoral Candidate

College Student Affairs Administration

University of Georgia

aka@uga.edu

If you do not wish to receive a reminder about this study, please opt out by clicking here [embedded link].

This follow-up reminder that was sent a week after the initial invitation was a duplicate email with this additional text at the top:

Just a reminder .... if you have not had an opportunity to complete this survey, we would love to have your input. Click here to begin [embedded link].

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE

The entire questionnaire, including instructions to participants, if-then logic, questions, and response options, is provided below. Horizontal lines indicate a break between web pages.

Institutional Decisions to Sponsor Memorials for Deceased College Students

01T Informed Consent

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study on institutional decisions to sponsor memorials for deceased college students.

The risks to participating in this study are no more than you would encounter in everyday professional life. You can choose not to respond to any question or stop at any time. Your responses will be anonymized and will not be linked to you or your institution. If you have questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me, A. Kay Anderson, at aka@uga.edu or my advisor, Dr. Merrily Dunn, at merrily@uga.edu.

To begin the survey, please confirm your position using the question below.

02Q SSAO

Are you the senior student affairs officer at your institution?

Yes

No

If 02Q SSAO = No, Then 03T Not SSAO

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Participation is limited to senior student affairs officers.

If you would like to receive the results of this study when they are complete, please use this separate link [embedded link] to provide an email address.

End of Survey

If 02Q SSAO = Yes, Then 04T Definitions and 05Q Sponsorship [forced choice response]

Please respond to the following questions based on your current institution's policy or practice and these definitions:

- A memorial is something that commemorates the life of a student. A memorial may be a ceremony, a physical object, a place, or an action.
- Institutional sponsorship refers to university-wide or departmental efforts to coordinate, organize, facilitate, or fund a memorial.
- Administrative or support functions, such as sending notifications to the campus or mobilizing the counseling center, would not be classified as a memorial or as sponsorship.

Using these definitions, does your institution or a department of your institution sponsor memorials for students who die while attending your institution?

Always

Sometimes

Never

If 05Q Sponsor = Never, Then 06Q Never Sponsor Memorials

Why has your institution chosen not to sponsor memorials for students who die while attending your institution? (Please select all that apply.)

Difficulty treating all students the same

Difficulty creating a memorial that is appropriate for all deceased students

Student body is too large

Student body is not residential or is spread among multiple campuses

Prefer to allow kinship groups to handle the ceremony

Lack of student interest

Fear number of deaths would be overwhelming to community

Cost

Other _____

If 05Q Sponsor = Always or Sometimes, Then 07Q Written Policy

Does your current institution have a written policy or practice that describes how you memorialize a student who dies while attending your institution?

Yes

No

If 05Q Sponsor = Always or Sometimes, Then 08Q All the Same

Does your current institution memorialize all deceased students in the same manner?

Yes

No

If 05Q Sponsor = Always or Sometimes, Then 09Q Memorials Types

How does your current institution memorialize deceased students? (Please select all that apply.)

Individual memorial service, using the same format for all deceased students

Individual memorial service, personalized for each deceased student

Group memorial service for all students who have died within a particular time frame

Recognition at commencement or other institutional ceremony

Granting a posthumous degree or certificate of attendance

Physical memorial (i.e., plant a tree, memorial bench, include name on a monument or plaque)

Gift or token to the family

Video or written messages to the family

Social media post

Internet page or post

Physical demonstration (i.e., flags flown at half-staff)

Establishment of a scholarship or other fund

Other _____

If 05Q Sponsor = Always or Sometimes, Then 10Q Objectives

What are your current institution's objectives when planning a memorial? (Please select all that apply.)

Establish that the deceased was a valued member of the campus community

Provide members of the campus community with an opportunity for formal mourning

Help disseminate information about the mourning process

Provide information about resources for distressed community members

Create a permanent remembrance on campus

Other _____

If 05Q Sponsor = Always or Sometimes, Then 11Q Student Type

Based on your experience and insight, how likely is it that your current institution would sponsor a memorial for the following types of students?

An undergraduate student

A graduate student

A fully online student

A part-time student

A commuter student

An adult learner (age 25 or older)

A non-degree seeking student

A well-known student (athlete, student leader, online influencer, etc.)

A comparatively unknown student

For each student type, these choices were provided as radio buttons on the same row:

Definitely would not (1)

Probably would not (2)

Possibly would not (3)

Unsure (4)

Possibly would (5)

Probably would (6)

Definitely would (7)

Not applicable

Would this be viewed as a departure from your usual practice?

For each student type, these choices were provided as radio buttons at the end of the same row:

Yes

No

If 05Q Sponsor = Always or Sometimes, Then 12Q Type of Death

Based on your experience and insight, how likely is it that your current institution would sponsor a memorial for one of your students under the following conditions?

A student dies by suicide

A student dies from a drug or alcohol overdose

A student dies unexpectedly from natural causes

A student dies from natural causes following a known illness

A student dies as a result of another person's criminal activity or negligence

A student dies as a result of their involvement in criminal activity

A student dies as a result of a hate crime committed against them

A student dies in an incident for which the institution may be liable

A student dies in a highly publicized incident (e.g., major accident, mass shooting, natural disaster, terrorist attack)

Multiple students die in one incident (e.g., an automobile accident)

For each type of death, these choices were provided as radio buttons on the same row:

Definitely would not (1)

Probably would not (2)

Possibly would not (3)

Unsure (4)

Possibly would (5)

Probably would (6)

Definitely would (7)

Would this be viewed as a departure from your usual practice?

For each death type, these choices were provided as radio buttons at the end of the same row:

Yes

No

If 05Q Sponsor = Always or Sometimes, Then 13Q Values

Based on your experience and insight, how important are the following values when deciding to sponsor a memorial?

Providing a unique, personal memorial

Maintaining uniformity

Ensuring transparency

Honoring the family's wishes or requests

Respecting students' wishes or requests

Providing closure for members of the institutional community

Fostering social justice

Avoiding potential legal liability

Maintaining positive public relations

Following best practices

For each value, these choices were provided as radio buttons on the same row:

Not important at all (1)

Not very important (2)

Of little importance (3)

Neutral (4)

A little important (5)

Somewhat important (6)

Extremely important (7)

If 05Q Sponsor = Always or Sometimes, Then 14Q Other Aspects

Are there other aspects of your current institution's memorial practice(s) that you would like to share?

If 05Q Sponsor = Always or Sometimes, Then 15Q Responsible Dept

Which office at your institution is primarily responsible for planning and implementing the memorial?

President's Office

Event or Protocol Office

Student Affairs

Academic Affairs

Enrollment Management

Academic College or Department

University Chaplain or Campus Ministry

Advancement

Student Government

Other _____

If 02Q SSAO = Yes, Then 16Q Classification

What is your current institution's basic Carnegie classification?

Doctoral university

Master's college or university

Baccalaureate college

Associate's college

Special focus institution

Tribal college

If 02Q SSAO = Yes, Then 17Q Size

What size is your institution?

Very small

Small

Medium

Large

Very Large

Exclusively graduate/professional

If 02Q SSAO = Yes, Then 18Q Control

What is your institution's source of control?

Public

Private

For-profit

If 02Q SSAO = Yes, Then 19Q Religious Affiliation

Is your institution affiliated with an established religious organization?

Yes

No

If 02Q SSAO = Yes, Then 20Q Number of Deaths

At your current institution, approximately how many student deaths occur in an average academic year?

0-3

4-6

7-9

10-12

13 or more

21T End of Survey

Thank you. I truly appreciate your willingness to share your time, insight, and experience. If you would like to receive the results of this study when they are complete, please use this separate link [embedded link] to provide an email address.

APPENDIX E

REQUEST FOR RESULTS

This Qualtrics form was used to collect email addresses from individuals who wanted to receive the results of this study. A link to this form was provided in the email invitation to participate and follow-up reminder. All respondents were also given the link again at the end of the questionnaire. Recipients were not required to complete the study to request the results.

Institutional Decisions to Sponsor Memorials for Deceased College Students

Results Request

01T Request

If you would like to receive the results of this study on institutional decisions to sponsor memorials for deceased college students, please provide an email address below.

This page is not linked to the questionnaire or to your responses. Your request to receive study results does not imply or require participation in the study. If desired, you may enter a personal email address rather than a work email address.

02T End of Survey

Thank you again for your interest in this study. I look forward to sharing the results with you later this semester. If you have any questions about this study, you are welcome to contact me at aka@uga.edu or my advisor, Dr. Merrily Dunn, at merrily@uga.edu.

APPENDIX F

NOT HUMAN RESEARCH DETERMINATION

The not human research determination letter from the University of Georgia Human Subjects Office is included on the following page. This is a true copy of the original.

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Tucker Hall, Room 212
310 E. Campus Rd.
Athens, Georgia 30602
TEL 706-542-3199 | FAX 706-542-5638
IRB@uga.edu
http://research.uga.edu/hso/irb/

Human Research Protection Program

NOT HUMAN RESEARCH DETERMINATION

January 25, 2023

Dear Merrily Dunn:

On 1/25/2023, the Human Subjects Office reviewed the following submission:

Title of Study:	Institutional Decisions to Sponsor Memorials for Deceased College Students
Investigator:	Merrily Dunn
Co-Investigator:	Alexandra Anderson
IRB ID:	PROJECT00006768
Funding:	None

We have determined that the proposed activity is not designed as research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations. The activity is designed to gather information from key informants in order to understand institution-sponsored student memorial practices (e.g., number of institutions conducting memorials, types of memorials, decision-making considerations).

University of Georgia (UGA) IRB review and approval is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human subjects, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

Jessica Lasebikan, HRPP Assistant Director
Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia

APPENDIX G

WRITTEN COMMENTS FROM SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

This appendix includes all comments collected through free-text entry fields on the questionnaire. Responses have been redacted to preserve institutional and respondent anonymity. Other than capitalization, no changes have been made to the text.

Why has your institution chosen not to sponsor memorials for students who die while attending your institution?

- Alternate method of memorializing.
- We post announcements
- Some families do not want any recognition by/in the university community and their wishes are the most important
- We are a public two-year community college
- Hard to differentiate cause of death and impact of those related to suicide
- Fear that deaths by suicide could be seen as celebrated.
- We don't actually have a policy that says what we would do in the case of a student death.

How does your current institution memorialize deceased students?

- In case of campus mass casualty event, held service for 1 student who died on the scene.
- Campus Vigil

- Award (non-monetary) in student's honor
- Email; SGA Memorial Resolution. All others are initiated by groups or individuals varies based on the student, contact with family, and manner of death.
- We have installed benches, held memorial services on campus, informed campus community members about off-campus memorial services, mentioned deceased students at convocation or baccalaureate, etc., based on the wishes of the family.
- Posthumous degree only if 3/4 done with their program
- Awarding of a posthumous degree is consistent. At this point, this is not a ceremony in place to recognize.
- Bell ringing
- Although it has been a practice for those that meet specific criteria, (number of hours towards degree completion), the university is working on a policy for posthumous degree confirmation.
- Any of those may be possible, depending on the wishes of the students' family
- We work with the family to respect their wishes and level of recognition.
- Posthumous degrees are given to students who would have earned the credits for graduation in the semester that they die. Posthumous honorary degrees may be given out after a student has earned 99 credits and has excelled. Faculty vote on these.
- ceremony at our memorial garden
- Letter to community
- It depends on many factors: progress towards degree, wishes of the family, etc.
- The individual memorial service is private with University admin and the family. It is offered to the family but not required. If student groups want to host a larger, more public ceremony, staff work with them to coordinate.

- We fly our institution flag one day in honor of the student and then send it to the family in memory of the student who passed.
- Sometimes we will grant a degree, not typically.
- We always send a campus email
- It is very individualized and must be in concert with our to the wishes of the family of the deceased student. We do not act alone or of our own without a conversation with the family or guardian.
- Student deaths are rare here, so our approach has been more tailored to the circumstances. We have done many of the items in the list associated with this question but none of them (other than our policy on posthumous degrees) are codified.
- Email notice to the campus community
- Dependent on wishes of the family
- Recognition at athletic matches (for deceased athletes).
- Celebration of life service
- The granting of a posthumous degree only occurs when certain conditions are met.
- Memorial exhibition (art & design college)
- Attendance at services held at student's home town
- The University typically will not sponsor an "individual" memorial. When they occur they are led by student organizations, the family, or other student leadership. We do recognize at graduation with posthumous degrees; and, we have a memorial service for "all" members of the university that we lost during the year, called [program name]. Fortunately, we have not had a mass casualty event which would no doubt change this protocol.

What are your current institution’s objectives when planning a memorial?

- We have an once a year memorial to recognize any faculty, staff or student who passed away.
- We are identifying a memorial site on campus
- Support the family's wishes
- Support the student's family and other individuals that are not a part of our community
- Help the family cope with the loss.
- Given that there is no current practice, none of the options apply.
- Support parents, siblings, and other family members, boyfriends/girlfriends, and others not part of the campus community.
- Again, outcomes vary based on the type of memorial planned, which is always aligned with the wishes of the family
- Respect family wishes.
- Honor the family's wishes
- Engage family members with student friends, faculty and classmates.
- Allow the family a time to return to campus to honor their student.
- Being a Catholic institution, we will also coordinate the memorial with the deceased student's clergy if possible
- Private opportunity for the family to receive a diploma or certificate of achievement.
- The other objectives identified are also attended to but through individualized outreach and not through the memorial process.
- Recognizing their path to completing a degree
- Support the family of our lost student

- When we do anything beyond the email is when we look at this other stuff. And the events and students connection to the institution play into this.
- Honor the wishes of the student's family
- Again, we approach each student death--which is very rare--individually, so some of these items may or may not apply depending on the specific circumstances.
- Assist in meeting the needs of the family.
- Varies based on the wishes of the family
- Provide support for parents / family members.
- As a community college the goal is to respect the person and their family.
- Supporting the wishes of the family
- Minimizing risk of contagion when death was by suicide
- Provide support for the family
- Honoring wishes of the family

Are there other aspects of your current institution's memorial practice(s) that you would like to share?

- Physical reminders (trees planted, benches, scholarships) require a minimum contribution from friends/family. They are not paid for by the university.
- All opportunities would be with respect for the family's wishes.
- Our practice is to place a memorial book in our library provided through Student Government Association for any current student who has passed away and send condolences to the family with a card.
- In all student death situations we let the family take the lead. We share with them ways that we have memorialized other students. We talk to the family about our need as a

community to honor their student's life and to begin the healing process. We also send a University representative to every student's funeral service as long as the family is supportive of that.

- We are a large institution. Unfortunately, students have passed away. The Dean of Students Office used to send a condolence card to the family. However, we have stopped that practice because the family contacts the Dean and has the expectation that the Dean personally knew the student...which most times was not the case. It created an undue burden on the Dean and was uncomfortable.
- Since my current institution does not have a practice to honor and memorialize students who pass away while enrolled, my answers are a bit skewed. At previous institutions, one office coordinated the effort, worked with families and was consistent in the practice. If a student group wanted to offer a memorial/vigil the University would assist them, as we do for event planning for all.
- Several of the responses ask about the individual experience (i.e. Providing a unique, personal memorial). Our goal/practice is to honor each individual student within the format of the university wide memorial by personalizing each student's presentation.
- The most important aspect for us is honoring the family's wishes, followed by the needs and wishes of the students most closely connected to the student who has passed.
- The institution always sends a card from the President of the Institution and if possible, sends a representative to any service. Faculty/Staff are always notified of the passing via email and any students that are currently involved in classes with the student are provided in-person notification of the death. With social media as it is, the institution is often the last place to know and we always wait to send condolences until we have verification of facts.

- Sometimes friends of students who pass away will organize their own memorials or rituals if they are part of student organizations or are particularly well-know. The University's memorial is coordinated with family members. It includes a noon bell ringing, lunch with the family (and friends), and presentations of university attendance and sometimes posthumously awarded degrees.
- It is important to note that my answers are related to out formal student memorial process. There are also occasions, if initiated by students, when the University will support an immediate and less formal/uniform memorial for a loss that had significant and immediate impact.
- In addition to honoring current students who passed away, our ceremony also acknowledges any current faculty/staff who have passed away, and also provides a moment to honor those alumni who have passed away during the past year.
- Many of the institution's memorial practices during a current student's death are student-led.
- These questions are difficult if not impossible to answer, as the circumstances of any student death are always unique. So there is no "this is what we do" answer to these questions. The one thing that we consistently do is to honor the wishes of the students' family.
- As a Catholic Jesuit institution, we are committed to our religious tradition and lean on our tradition to best support our community in grief.
- The institution's leadership tries to attend funerals and personal memorial services as they are able. Posthumous degrees are awarded based upon credits earned and in progress at the time of the death. Ongoing memorials and anniversary events are

managed delicately balancing the wishes of the family, students, and campus community.

- We have a student death protocol on our campus. We work with the family and respect their wishes with regards to how we address the death with the campus community.
- Decisions are in conjunction with the family when we are able to reach the family and may include students attending a family run memorial or family run fundraising/ scholarship campaign as well - where the university would support the family in their efforts
- We are a small college, everyone knows everyone else. We had two students die in an auto accident last year. At first, we were told they were at fault. Later when the official report was released we learned that the other driver was at fault. We partnered with the community to do a memorial service for our students and the other driver. Then we dedicated a tree on campus to our two students this past fall.
- We have consistency with protocol, but perhaps the most important is that our protocol designates a single point of contact within the VPSA office to handle and facility anything a family needs. I believe this is the most useful and appreciated practice by families. On my responses that said we would "always" honor different students, that is our intent.
- We are not always notified in a timely way for students who do not have a strong campus footprint (online only, etc.), but we do always honor those students when we find out. Their other consideration is family wishes. We would forego any public recognition at the request of a family, which would be a departure from normal, but that has not happened in the 10 years I have served in this position.

- It is part of our Death of a Student Protocol to honor the family's wishes as much as possible. We do not have a specific policy or protocol for memorializing students. We do grant posthumous degrees but the student must have been a certain number of credits close to commencement.
- For the most part we let the campus response determine how we recognize a student's passing. Often if an identifiable or defined group of students was especially close to the student (e.g., athletic team, residence hall, club/organization, major), we let the students influence and plan how they wish to see the student memorialized. That leads meaningful variability in our response.
- The values of having a deep respect and care for the individual, making sure their friends, colleagues, faculty have a place to share stories and grieve as a community, and ensuring that whether the student is well known and active, or not, that his/her/their life mattered to our campus.
- Although the institution has a "Death of a Student Protocol," we do not include memorial information as part of that process. There is no formal memorial process to share with the campus community.
- We aim to create a uniform approach to dealing with student deaths but it is difficult because the cause of death, desires of the campus community and family all vary. We do try to do a posthumous degree for students who die after completing a certain number of units if the family is interested. However, there are instances when there is a desire from the campus community or family to have some sort of memorial or recognition so we do something but the nature and scale do vary. At this point we're really dealing with these on a case-by-case in terms of our approach to memorializing the student.

- The wishes of the family drive our decision making about most aspects of honoring the deceased. We have a memorial garden on campus and with survivor approval, we install a plaque with the deceased students name. On most occasions, immediately following a student's death we gather for a vigil/remembrance and use this time to support our mourning students.
- With family permission, we hold a memorial service unique to the deceased a short time later.
- We hold an annual ceremony where we honor faculty, staff and students. It is a beautiful celebration for our community.
- We work individually with each members' immediate friendship circle and the deceased members' family member when we make these decisions. There is no one size fits all around the decision to have a memorial or what the memorial looks like.
- We review each student death against our Death of a Student Protocol. As this survey identifies, there are so many factors that go into the decision about how to respond to student death...it's never a once size fits all. That said, to the best of our ability, we try to use the next planned liturgical celebration to remember the student who passed...
- This question would have been easier if it established the point of view. As the CSAO, I might feel one way, but the institutional culture might indicate something with which I personally would not include, or I would include something additional when I was at a public institution.
- Please see previous comment about the type of memorial we offer. Private ceremony with family to present a degree or certificate of achievement. We do not sponsor or host public memorials for any reason but would provide administrative support to students that wish to organize a vigil.

- We have a granite memorial in a garden on campus remembering community members (students, faculty and staff) who have died during their enrollment or service to the University.
- We have a remembrance day annually that is associated with a community service activity. Student organizations also plan rituals or vigils throughout the year with support of Dean of Students and Counseling to allow for more personal and small group grieving. Additional memorials may then be considered by Development or under special circumstances but the remembrance garden becomes the focal point especially for those families who are not able to offer or organize a financial contributions necessary to maintain a memorial.
- We do not individually memorialize students in places or with specific mementos or at specific places. We do not make any space with individual names. We do one ceremony each year to acknowledge our community members we have lost. We do have a space on each of our campuses that is a reflection space (i.e., bench) that we acknowledge with our program name, [program name]. We also include our live mascot, [type of animal], at each ceremony.
- At our institution the most important function is honoring the student's life and pursuit of higher education in accordance with the family's wishes. Additionally, ensuring administratively that we've done our due diligence so they are not receiving phone calls or correspondence for the deceased student.
- If the funeral "at home" is within driving distance, we offer to sponsor a bus to facilitate friends' attendance. We invite the family to the memorial on campus. We host a reception pre or post-service for friends/family of the deceased. We reach out to professors and students close to the student through the Counseling Center. Someone

from the Counseling Center will attend the "next" class of the student (for their full schedule) to help process the grief with the professor/students, if the professor wants us to do this. We talk with the friends/communities the student was connected to to see how we can meet their needs and support them (post memorial service).

- The spiritual beliefs of the institution (and the student, if pertinent).
- I work at a Catholic institution and we offer weekday and Sunday masses. In the past, we have used existing masses as an opportunity to 'memorialize' or remember a member of the community who has passed away. We only offer this opportunity if the family agrees to it.
- The major factor for every question on this survey is honoring the wishes of the parents/family/guardians. That really is the single more important factor for memorials - which is separate from helping the community grieve/mourn/etc.
- We only send emails on deaths of students to the campus community. We always include in those a call for counseling and other services. If we do a memorial it is only in rare occasions. We had five students die in a car accident the first week of school and we did a memorial then.
- [Institution] provides the memorial tree for any currently enrolled student who passes away. Our Dean of Students office works with Campus Services to facilitate the planting and the plaque that goes with the tree. It states “Given in loving memory by [Institution name]”.
- Each decision about whether to host a memorial or a permanent memorialization on the campus is made individually. We have definitely done so for a student who has committed suicide and for a student who died from drug use, one of whom has a picture placed in one of the lecture halls (in perpetuity) and the other has an award

given at the annual awards ceremony in her name. The primary guidance here is balancing the student needs with the family wishes.

- Everything is context bound and based on wishes of student's family/guardians.
- We always provide options to the student's family and follow their lead.
- The primary focus for memorials after a recent student death was community care and providing support to move forward together.
- Our institution is not financially capable to create memorials for students that may pass during their enrollment at the college. The most important is to respect the family's wishes and honor the student for their contributions.
- We have just begun offering memorial services once a semester for all students who have died the previous semester. This has occurred for two years. With that said, there is no coordination with Student Affairs. It is run out of the President's office along with support from the Faculty Senate. Student Affairs should be involved as we are on first for all student deaths to this is something we need to address.
- Sensitivity to the religious traditions of the family.
- We consult with the family to ensure their wishes are considered, especially if it is death by suicide or alcohol/drug overdoses.
- We host an in memoriam page, with details about the student, any donation opportunities, etc. We coordinate and pay for hotel arrangements if and when the family comes to campus.
- We always are guided by the family's wishes.
- Our decision to sponsor an event would depend largely on the wishes of the student or the family. Our next priority in terms of making a decision to sponsor would be based on

the student's social group. For example, if an Asian student passed away and the Asian Student Association wanted to hold an event.

- In some instances, memorials are not held on campus if the student lives locally and family is having a service. in that instance we would sponsor transportation (buses) to take students to the service.
- The sad thing is that we do not have a "practice" or standard procedure. Now I want to ensure that we have a policy/procedure. It depends upon who the student is and what
- Relationship they have with people on campus as to whether, first of all, someone knows something tragic has happened and if we will do anything about it. Doesn't seem fair when we consider ourselves a "family" and a community of learners. Hence, having something in place would be important. How the reflection looks can be based upon the individual and their relationships but an acknowledgement in anyone's passing is important. The same is true for employees even though during semester assembly meetings there is acknowledgement and that is uniform but there are often individual and departmental events that will happen. The more popular an individual the more recognition.
- Our practices are general but adjusted case by case.
- While we centralize planning and coordination from Student Affairs for consistency, we will always involve people who are most closely affected so that they can have some closure and feel connected to the passing.
- We work closely with the family first and foremost to respect their wishes though we have a general way of proceeding if they are supportive (i.e., Mass and plaque)

Which office at your institution is primarily responsible for planning and implementing the memorial?

- Student Affairs coordinates with president's office and campus ministry
- Student Affairs and Campus Ministry are equal partners in planning.
- If we implement in the future, which I will advocate for, Student Affairs will take the lead and collaborate with other offices.
- Memorials don't always occur
- Memorials are a collaborative effort with Campus Ministry and Student Affairs
- It is typically a coordinated effort between Student Affairs and Campus Ministry
- Campus ministry and student affairs partner with family to plan when requested
- Student Affairs and Campus Ministry work closely together.
- Campus Ministry in collaboration with Student Affairs
- It is a shared responsibility between all the divisions.
- Collaboration between Student Affairs and the Mission Offices
- Collaborative between multiple departments
- Depends on where there was a relationship