

DEO ESSENTIALS

Dealing with the Death of a Faculty Member

There are a number of things a Department Executive Officer should do when a faculty member dies or is soon to pass away. If the individual has not yet died, it is important to be aware of the many elements involved in keeping the faculty member's affairs functioning. If the individual dies suddenly, some of what follows may not apply, but most will be matters for DEOs to address.

Be sure to ask for help from colleagues and rely on delegating many of these responsibilities; you will likely be the primary point of contact at the university for the faculty member and their survivors/partner during this difficult time. Do not expect the faculty member and their family members to act as they normally do because grief can cause people to lash out at those trying to help. You need to be sure to take care of yourself, as well. This is one of the most difficult things for DEOs to do.

- 1.** Human Resources can help. You can find information on their website at hr.unl.edu and speak with a Human Resources Officer at 402-472-3101. The Employee Assistance Program can also help. Their website is hr.unl.edu/eap and you can contact them at 402-472-3107, 888-445-9881 and eap@unl.edu.
- 2.** Keep your Dean's Office aware of what is happening. Save all email communications and document the situation and your actions. You might also keep a log of phone conversations.
- 3.** Suggest to the spouse/partner or next of kin that they contact Human Resources to get a clear understanding of the benefits arrangements that are possible to the surviving beneficiaries. The most important of these are health insurance benefits. This information can be confusing or difficult to process. The Faculty HR Specialist in the Executive Vice Chancellor's Office or the HR Specialist in your college can help with this.
- 4.** Arrange for coverage of classes. If necessary, contact your college Dean's Office for emergency funds to pay a replacement instructor.
- 5.** Work with Information Technology Services immediately to manage the individual's email account. They can be contacted at 402-472-3970, 866-472-3970 and support@nebraska.edu. If possible, get permission in writing to gain access to email and other accounts normally used by the individual and be sure to coordinate with the individual's partner/spouse. Give this access to your support staff, specifically your Department Office Director and IT Specialist, so that you can:
 - Access all requests made through Concur for travel or other reimbursements as they are being processed. In some cases, there may be requests for refunds pending that require receipts. In general, if you can gain access to these receipts, the refund will be completed, but if you cannot, the refund will not usually be offered.
 - Access email so that you can archive the entire account for the later use of survivors/spouse. Many people rely on their department account for all correspondence, and it will be necessary to bring ongoing projects to a close.
 - Gain access to gradebooks, class assignments, and other pedagogical materials a replacement instructor will need.



DEO ESSENTIALS

Dealing with the Death of a Faculty Member

- 6.** If appropriate, contact colleagues or co-workers involved in any ongoing projects and inform them of the individual's status. If possible, get permission in writing from the individual regarding how to end their participation in the project(s). If the project has external funding, contact the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Research in the Office of Research and Economic Development at 402-472-3123 and unlresearch@unl.edu so that funding agencies, sponsored programs, and compliance offices can be notified, as needed. In some situations, an alternate PI can be identified so that existing grants and supports can be maintained. Doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows will need new supervisors, which will require working with the Office of Graduate Studies. They can be contacted at graduate@unl.edu and 402-472-2875.
- 7.** Arrange for the disposition of office materials. If possible, get the individual's wishes, ideally in writing, for disposition of expensive personal possessions used at work. In most cases, they will be given to the survivors, but in some cases, as with specialized technical instruments, computers, and other materials not owned by the university, there may be particular people the individual wishes to have them. Items purchased with grant funds are owned by the university.
- 8.** Contact all students directly involved in independent research with the faculty member. The Graduate Chair should be included in these conversations when they involve graduate students.
- 9.** Using the individual's CV, contact all professional organizations, boards, and journals to notify them of the end of the individual's services. If possible, obtain permission in writing from the individual or their power of attorney.
- 10.** Review off-prints, books, and other publications of the individual; the survivors might want them, and it is likely that colleagues will consider a memorial volume in some cases.
 - Faculty Papers – The University Libraries' Archivist can assist in the disposition of the individual's faculty papers, including any associated paperwork, and the removal of materials from the office with the help of the university's moving services. Let survivors know they can contact UNL's Archivist at archives@unl.edu.
 - Books – It is useful to arrange with the survivors a mutually satisfactory way of dealing with the individual's books. They may desire to keep many or all books, but in other cases, the survivors or individual may have particular colleagues in mind to receive them. Contact University Libraries at 402-472-2531 or archives@unl.edu to see whether any volumes might be included in the Libraries' [special collection](#) or if help is needed to discard unwanted materials.
- 11.** Be prepared to help arrange a memorial service with survivors if they express a desire for this. This can be an important means by which members of the department and the college can acknowledge the death of one their colleagues, and an opportunity for compassionate interaction that will allow the surviving family members to appreciate that their grief is shared. In some cases, it may be useful to contact the Employee Assistance Program for department grief counseling. They have trained specialists who can provide a means by which your colleagues can face the sorrow and confusion that accompany a colleague's death. EAP's website is hr.unl.edu/eap and you can contact them at 402-472-3107, 888-445-9881 and eap@unl.edu.