

## Check-List for Vigils/Memorials at UNCG

Sometimes, the university community experiences unexpected tragedies. To help students deal with the tragic event and its effects/aftermath, vigils and memorials are often held. Vigils and memorials provide structured opportunities for people to gather for mutual support, to express emotions through ritual, and to begin figuring out how to derive meaning and take purposeful action in response to the tragedy. To facilitate a meaningful experience for students whose lives have been disrupted by an unexpected tragedy, the following guidelines are recommended. When planning a vigil or memorial, you can use this as check-list.

- \_\_\_\_\_ The Dean of Students Office (or the lead student) will contact next-of-kin for deceased to see if the family is supportive of having a campus vigil/memorial service for their student. Ask if they would be willing/interested in attending this service and identify a primary point of contact for the family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Clear the event with Campus Activities and/or the Dean of Students Office.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Identify a potential date and proposed location for the memorial service. Contact the University Reservations Office at (336) 334-5510 to ask about reserving space.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Follow up with the Dean of Students Office at (336) 334-5514 to inform them of the date, time, and location for the service. This office will assist you with the following logistics for planning the vigil/memorial service:
  - a. Work with the University Communications Office to share information about the service.
  - b. Notify the deceased student's faculty members, advisors, academic college, Housing and Residence Life staff (if applicable), Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and the Chancellor about the event.
  - c. Contact the Counseling Center and ask that grief counseling be available if needed.
  - d. Invite staff from Campus Ministries and HRL to be a supportive presence and obtain contact information of staff to assist with the service if appropriate
  - e. Arrange for a sound system as well as ASL interpreter (also a Spanish interpreter if you anticipate a number of people whose first language is Spanish).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Review this check-list with students involved in leading the vigil/memorial as well as the faculty/staff liaison.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Publicize the vigil/memorial service through both formal and informal means such as:
  - a. Contact other friends of the deceased student to make them aware of the service.
  - b. Post the service on a Facebook page or the deceased student's page.
  - c. Share details of the service with student organizations that the deceased may have been a member.
  - d. Send information about the service to the Director of Campus Activities and Programs for Clubs and Organizations (if needed) and ask that they share this with all clubs and organizations.
  - e. Provide information about the service to the Carolinian (if needed)
- \_\_\_\_\_ At the very beginning of vigil/memorial, introduce campus support, i.e., staff from Campus Ministries, Counseling Center, HRL.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tell those gathered how the service will proceed, give a brief overview. *For example:*
  - a. Names of specific speakers
  - b. Comments from university administrator (if appropriate)
  - c. Vocalists and/or musicians
  - d. Faith affiliates/ministers
  - e. Scripture readings and prayers (if appropriate)
  - f. Candle lighting Service
  - g. Provide newsprint for people who may want to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Let people know where these will be posted on campus. If family members of the

deceased are present, the student leaders ought to offer to send them the newsprint after campus is finished with it or send them pictures of newsprint.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Begin on time and end on time. This is very important as it provides structure and predictability which are two core ingredients in effective vigils/memorials.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Avoid talking about details of the person's death, especially if it was death by suicide. If the person died by suicide, do not romanticize suicide, do not say it happened for a reason or for no good reason. Again, speakers need to focus on how they are going to take purposeful action or how their lives have been impacted by the event/person's life. Limit each speaker to **5 minutes (max)**!
- \_\_\_\_\_ Resist requests or the idea to have an 'open mic'. Instead, identify 2-3 speakers who will focus on: how the tragic event or the deceased person touched their life, made a difference in their life, and what the speakers will do differently from this point forward as a result of event/death.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ask those gathered, "in the coming days, to whom are you going to reach out to obtain support, to offer support".
- \_\_\_\_\_ Provide information (verbally and in writing) about resources, i.e., the UNCG Counseling Center, National Suicide Prevention Hotline, and other related events in the community.