

When Tragedy Strikes: Healing and Action after a Campus Crisis

A photograph of a man in a dark patterned t-shirt lighting a candle in a small glass holder on a stone ledge. The ledge is part of a long, narrow pool of water that stretches into the distance. The water reflects the warm light of the candles and the setting sun. In the background, a large, multi-story building with many lit windows is visible against a twilight sky. Other people are scattered around the pool area, some looking towards the building. The overall atmosphere is somber and reflective.

Brian L. Watkins
Director, Parent and Family Affairs
University of Maryland

Cynthia Hill
Director, Parents Program
Penn State University

Learning Outcomes

- Participants will gain insight into the tragedies at Penn State University and the University of Maryland and the impact on their campus communities.
- Participants will learn how professional staff helped manage communication and messaging.
- Participants will reflect on the issues raised by these tragedies, including Greek life, alcohol use, racism, and community standards, and the role of parent/family professionals in helping the campus community to move forward.
- Participants will understand the importance of other-care and radical self-care.



PennState
Student Affairs

Parents Program



DIVISION OF
STUDENT AFFAIRS

PARENT AND FAMILY AFFAIRS

WARNING

The following slides include details that some may find hard to hear.



PennState
Student Affairs

Parents Program



DIVISION OF
STUDENT AFFAIRS
PARENT AND FAMILY AFFAIRS

Penn State University

Greek-Life Tragedy



Penn State's Greek System

- One of the largest in the country
- 17% of student population
- Sororities housed on campus
- Fraternities housed in private, off-campus residences
- Three fraternities have houses within campus boundary, but sit on private property



PennState
Student Affairs

Parents Program

What Happened?

On February 2, 2017, Tim Piazza, a 19-year old sophomore, attended a pledging event at Beta Theta Pi at 9:00pm. There is excessive drinking (Tim participates). By 10:45pm he is noticeably intoxicated. After falling down the basement stairs, showing visible signs of injury, the brothers attempt to keep him awake (this is followed by a second fall down the stairs). Brothers call for help nearly 13 hours after the first fall. Tim is “life-flighted” to Hershey Medical Center with traumatic injuries and pronounced dead when he arrives to the hospital. His BAC is estimated at .28 - .32. He suffered significant brain and internal injuries. Security camera video captures most of the events.



PennState
Student Affairs

Parents Program

Timeline

February 2	Beta Theta Pi pledging event
February 4	1:23am - Tim Piazza pronounced dead at the hospital
February 7	All social functions suspended, effective immediately
February 17	Beta Theta Pi (a “model” fraternity) loses University recognition
March 29	Beta Theta Pi permanently banned from campus and new restrictions placed on Greek-letter groups
May 5	Grand jury presentment shared publically; 18 fraternity brothers charged
June 1	New safety initiatives for Greek-letter groups; essentially eliminates ability for self-governance
Summer	Preliminary hearings held; felonies eliminated; charges dropped for 10

Parents React

- It's Penn State's fault, they are not doing enough
- It's about time
- Lack of understanding of the independence of Greek-letter groups
- Don't do something that might impact my student's experience (in others words, don't take away their fun)
- Sense of entitlement for information
- But, the Greek-system brings endless benefits
- Significant "conversations" on private parent Facebook group; eventually a "Greek Parent" private group

“Underage drinking and drinking in general is out of control on and off campus. I'm glad they are taking steps to try and address the issue.”

“You will no longer receive a dime of our donations after such an unjust act. The bad actions of a few should never seek to harm all that are good in the system.”

“...keep deluding yourself that scape-goating the Greek community will eradicate alcohol abuse issues at PSU”

“What about house parties?”



PennState
Student Affairs

Parents Program

Penn State's Response

- Communications were strictly controlled by Strategic Communications Office
- Created a website: pennstateupdate.psu.edu
- Administration significantly involved
- Swift changes made to Greek-life
- Still dealing with legal issues

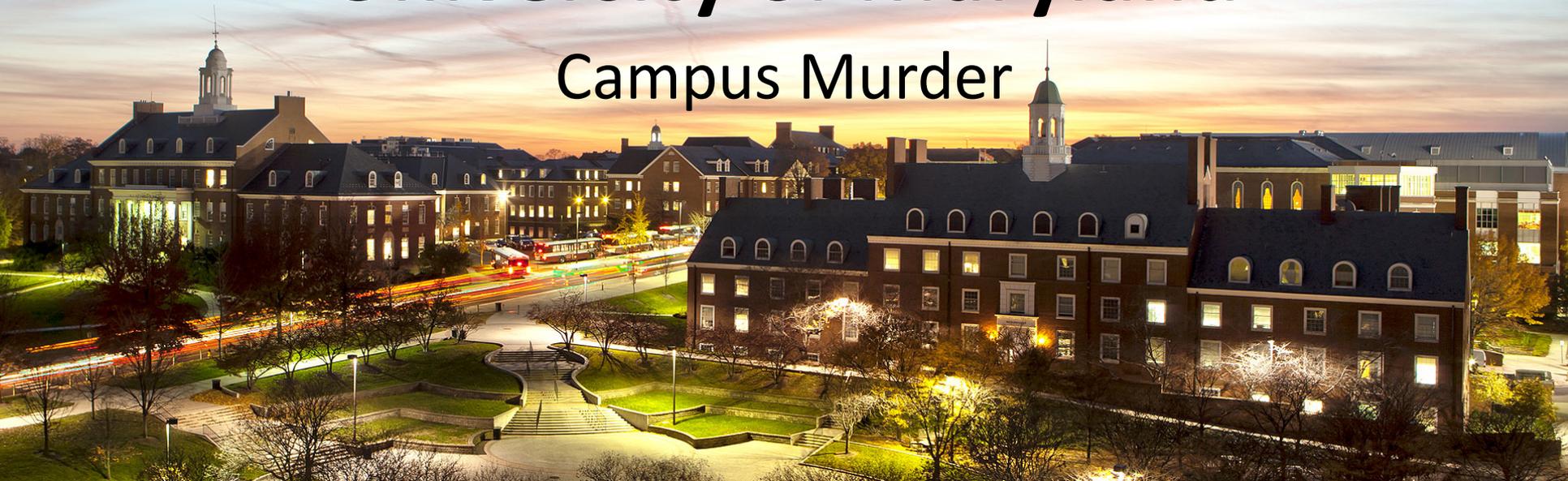


PennState
Student Affairs

Parents Program

University of Maryland

Campus Murder



What happened?



On Saturday, May 20, 2017, at approximately 3:03 a.m., Lt. Richard Collins III, a senior from Bowie State University, was waiting at a bus stop on campus with his friends from the University of Maryland. Collins and his friends were approached by Sean Urbanski, a UMD student. Urbanski told Collins to step out of his way “if you know what’s good for you,” and then stabbed Collins in the chest with a knife. Collins was later pronounced deceased. The investigation revealed that Urbanski was a member of the “Alt-Reich” racist Facebook group. Urbanski was indicted with one count of murder and was most recently indicted on a hate crime charge by a grand jury. This murder was precipitated by several hate and racial bias incidents on campus.



Timeline

Spring 2017	Noose found hanging outside of fraternity house; White nationalist propaganda found in several academic buildings on campus.
May 20	Lt. Richard Collins III murdered
	Aggressive investigation begins & Bowie State University and University of Maryland campuses react; national media everywhere
May 21	UMD holds moment of silence during Commencement
May 24	Bowie State holds Commencement UMD launches UMD Reflects: www.umdreflects.umd.edu
Summer	Urbanski indicted for murder and hate crime UMD campus discussions continue; “Fear the Turtle” slogan questioned
August 28 & 29	UMD Marching Band bans “Maryland, My Maryland”; UMD president announces robust action plan
August 30	University System of Maryland moment of silence for Lt. Collins

Parents and families react

- What the hell is going on there?
- Concerns about safety and security, especially for minoritized families, are heightened.
- Appreciative of the dialogue and progress.
- What are you doing about the Greeks?
- You can't eliminate hate speech and have free speech.
- No more "Maryland, My Maryland?" No more money from me.



“Thank you for taking a stand on the world we are living today.”

“Please move strongly ahead with this good work.”

From a father to his daughter:

“I suspect the tolerance agenda is being jammed down our throats. May God bless and protect your mind from the desensitization and brainwashing that occurs from constantly being bombarded with the stuff.”

“What a bunch of liberal biased crap!”



DIVISION OF
STUDENT AFFAIRS

PARENT AND FAMILY AFFAIRS

UMD's response

- Communications controlled by University Communications
- Created a website: www.umdreflects.umd.edu
- Administration, faculty, staff, and students significantly involved
- Swift action plan developed and implemented by president
- Office of Parent and Family Affairs considering how best to support families around safety/security concerns and racial trauma



Tips for PFP professionals

- Follow the lead of the communications team
- Make judgement calls (if you are able) regarding communication with parents and families
- Remember that not all emails require/deserve a response
- Incident response takes a team. Where are you in that process?
- Consider how your mission (institutional/departmental) can guide your response
- Be kind to yourself



PennState
Student Affairs

Parents Program



DIVISION OF
STUDENT AFFAIRS

PARENT AND FAMILY AFFAIRS

**Campus crises/issues can create a mental,
emotional, physical and spiritual toll on our selves.**

**Societal unrest
Images of violence
Daily microaggressions
+ Professional stressors**

Chronic stress

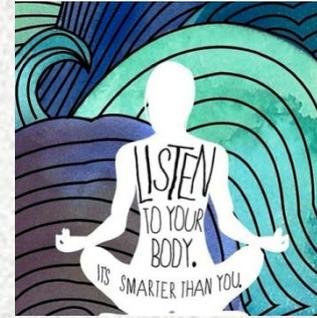
*From Kerry Ann Rockquemore, Ph.D.
President, National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity*



BE RADICAL!

What does your body need?

Sleep – Eat – Hydrate - Hugs



What does your mind need?

Be present



What does your spirit need?

*From Kerry Ann Rockquemore, Ph.D.
President, National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity*

What does your spirit need?

Make a **strategically meaningful contribution**

Develop a regular **rage practice**

Intentionally experience **joy, love, and gratitude**

*From Kerry Ann Rockquemore, Ph.D.
President, National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity*

Questions?



PennState
Student Affairs

Parents Program



DIVISION OF
STUDENT AFFAIRS

PARENT AND FAMILY AFFAIRS