

OBITUARIES: Procedures & Guidelines for Class Secretaries

April 19, 2016

TRADITIONAL ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CLASS SECRETARY

Communicating the passing of a classmate typically falls under the purview of the class secretary, though some classes assign this role to a separate class officer known as a class memorialist, necrologist, biographer or historian. When the latter is the case, it is still important for the memorialist to collaborate with the class secretary, as well as with the newsletter editor and the webmaster.

Obituaries run in the magazine online only (the print edition simply lists the name, class year and date of death of each deceased alum at the end of the Class Notes section). Secretaries ordinarily learn of a death from a classmate or from the *DAM* after it has been reported to the Alumni Records Office (ARO). If you hear of a death before receiving an official notification from the office of *DAM*, or if you aren't sure the ARO knows, it is important that you alert Michelle Brown in the ARO (603-646-2253 or Michelle.L.Brown@dartmouth.edu) without delay.

The passing of a classmate is not considered "official" until the College has closed his or her alum file and generated the one-page "Death Notice" of confirmed details. For the purposes of the magazine, no death is considered processed until the secretary or memorialist has received materials from *DAM*—which will always include a "Death Notice" and may include a newspaper obituary, additional info from the deceased's file and materials from the family. Once you have received those materials and have used them to confirm the details of a classmate's obituary, you should submit the obituary to Theresa D'Orsi at classnotes@dartmouth.edu or Theresa.m.dorsi@dartmouth.edu. This process ensures that a classmate is truly deceased and details such as date of death, hometown, survivors, etc. are accurate. Note that although class officers may publish any information on a class website or on any class social media platform, *DAM* will not accept any obituaries before its process is complete. Note as well that it is NOT appropriate to post obits on class social media platforms without first obtaining approval from a member of the family of the deceased.

Additional information and requirements with respect to communicating the death of a classmate include the following:

- Obituaries should adhere to the same style guidelines you use in your Class Notes columns. They will go through the standard *DAM* three-editor proofing process.
- The word limit for obituaries is 250.
- It is okay to ask a friend or family member of the deceased to write an obituary. Note, however, that you must let him/her know that you will need to review the copy and make any necessary edits resulting from word count or stylistic issues, and then you need to send it to the *DAM* (to the attention of Theresa D'Orsi) for final review and approval.

- Deadlines for submitting obits fall on the 15th of the month following submission of Class Notes columns. All obituaries are posted with an online issue. For example, the May-June Class Notes section of the *DAM*—due Feb. 28 and posted online by May 1—will go up with obituaries submitted by March 15.

Obituaries are posted on the *DAM* website (dartmouthalumnimagazine.com) and can be accessed by clicking on the “Class Notes & Obits” tab. Note that the obits section of the *DAM* website allows classmates, friends and family to post additional remembrances and memorial information as well, none of which are subject to a minimum word count.

Obituaries posted on class websites are also not subject to the 250-word restriction. In the event an expanded version of an obit is drafted, however, it is the responsibility of the class secretary or memorialist to ensure it is both accurate and grammatically correct. The posting of such information on the class website is the individual responsibility of the class officers.

ABOVE & BEYOND

You and your fellow class officers can decide if you want to do more than what is expected with respect to the handling of a classmate’s death. If this is the case, here are a few ideas on how you might go about this:

- Although not a requirement, you may want to share a draft of your obit with a spouse or other family member of the deceased before submitting it to the *DAM*. This serves to ensure accuracy of the content and is a nice way to make the family of the deceased feel better by including them in the process.
- Some classes choose to send a personal condolence note to the family of a deceased classmate on behalf of the entire class. This is typically handled by a class secretary, memorialist or, in some cases, a separate class officer known as a class steward. It’s a moving way to help families deal with their loss by showing how much the deceased meant to his/her class and remind them that they are part of a large, caring family.
- Separate from, or in addition to, a personal letter of condolence to the family, class officers might consider making a donation in the name of the deceased to an area of the College that was meaningful to him/her or perhaps to an existing and preferably ongoing class project.
- Some class secretaries choose to include the names and dates of death of classmates at the bottom of their columns as a way of alerting readers to those deaths. This is entirely up to the class secretary (some class secretaries make no mention of the deceased, but instead use their class newsletters or websites to communicate that information). If you are planning to write an obituary, you might also want to include a sentence along the lines of “Find a full obituary at dartmouthalumnimagazine.com.”
- There may be instances in which there is time to alert classmates who might wish to attend a funeral or memorial service. If so, the class secretary might work with other class officers to

alert classmates living in the area or who were close friends (if known). Such alerts usually take the form of a social media post (Facebook, Twitter) or individual emails relaying the details. Again, this is entirely up to the individual class secretary and how his or her class executive committee wants to handle such events.