



## OPINION | UCCS mishandles student death

BY: ELLA BARRY / ON: FEBRUARY 27, 2024 / IN: OPINIONS

It's been a tragic week for UCCS. Students, staff, faculty and community members are grieving the loss of three lives on campus, and UCCS has not handled this appropriately.

Days before the double homicide in UCCS dorms, nursing student Mia Brown died following a medical emergency at the campus rec center on the evening of Feb. 12. Following the incident, the rec center closed for the night but reopened the following morning at 10 a.m.

UCCS' message to students could not have been clearer:

1. Don't talk about it.
2. Brush it under the rug.
3. Acknowledge it once in a brief, campus-wide email offering condolences and counseling.
4. Move on with your lives.

The rec center reopened on Tuesday morning at 10 a.m., and student employees were expected to come into work, never mind that some of them had witnessed the tragedy the night before. Sure, they could have called out, but how were they to process their own trauma and determine whether they were fit to return to work in just a matter of hours?

When an incident as severe as a death occurs in a workplace, it should remain closed for at least the entirety of the following day to allow employees to process what has happened and get help if they need it.

The school notified Brown's family of her death before announcing it publicly in an email sent at 12:10 p.m. on Feb. 13. While Brown's family was rightfully informed in advance, the same cannot be said of her friends.

How many of Brown's friends were sitting in class or at work when they got the email that their friend was dead? No prior notice, just a campus-wide email with devastating news. And if they were in class, what could they have done? How do you process something like that while you're sitting in class, surrounded by peers, expected to be engaged in the lecture?

UCCS Policy 100-009 requires in the case of an emergency the UCCS department of public safety and the faculty/staff response team to "identify those who may be affected and need support including friends, roommates, spouse, family, faculty, etc." UCCS failed to do this for many of Brown's friends.

I did not personally know either of the students who died last week, but I know people who knew them, which I think can be said for many students. Everyone I've talked to who knew these students was disappointed with how they found out about their deaths.

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The university held healing events following the shooting that occurred on Feb. 16, but would they have held any healing events for Brown's death had the shooting not happened? It doesn't seem like it. There was a vigil scheduled and an email directing students in need of support to the wellness center, nothing more.

It's horrible that tragedies like these must occur for change to happen, but we must hold UCCS accountable for their inappropriate handlings of the recent deaths on campus and call on university administrators to ensure grieving students are given the time and space they need to recover.

*Alpine Valley. Photo by Lexi Petri.*

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**Missing information in SGA minutes raises question of conflict of interest**

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