

## Missing Students

The risk that a student might go missing is a concern for all colleges and universities. A report of a missing student can come from a variety of sources, including family, friends, or fellow students. Because of our concern for student safety, and in accordance with federal law, we have established this missing student notification policy and procedure.

Any Stetson University employee receiving information that a student is or may be missing should immediately report the situation to Public Safety unless the local law enforcement agency was the entity that made the determination that the student is missing.

At the beginning of each academic semester, each student residing in on-campus housing owned by Stetson University is presented the option to register a contact person whom the student wishes to be notified. Stetson University will notify the designated contact person within 24 hours of a determination that the student is missing. This contact person's information will be registered confidentially, accessible only to authorized Stetson University officials, and will only be used in the event that the student is determined missing. The contact person's information will be disclosed only to law enforcement personnel in the furtherance of a missing person investigation.

Stetson University will notify the appropriate law enforcement agency within 24 hours of the determination that a student residing in Stetson University housing is missing. If the student residing in Stetson University housing is under 18 years of age and not emancipated, Stetson University Public Safety, in addition to notifying law enforcement and any designated contacts, will notify the student's custodial parent or legal guardian within 24 hours of the determination that the student is missing.

### A. Scope of Policy

1. **Residential Students:** "Residential students" are students enrolled at Stetson University and who reside in Residential Living and Learning operated buildings, such as, but not limited to residence halls, Greek Chapter houses, and apartments. This policy applies when the Stetson University Public Safety Department-based on facts and circumstances known to the campus-determines that a residential student is missing. For purposes of this policy, a student may be considered to be "*missing*" if the student's absence is contrary to their usual pattern of behavior and unusual circumstances may have caused the absence. Such circumstances could include, but are not limited to, a report (a) of a student's absence from multiple classes in which the student is enrolled, (b) that the student may be the victim of foul play, or (c) that the student has expressed suicidal thoughts, is drug

dependent, is in a life-threatening situation, or has been with persons who may endanger their welfare.

2. **Non-Residential Students:** The University also is concerned about the safety of its non-residential students. Concerns about these students should be reported to Public Safety. But Public Safety's scope of authority is limited to the campus and University-owned property. Therefore, when a non-residential student is believed to be missing, the reporting person also should immediately notify local law enforcement authorities, and then provide the information to Public Safety in case the University is asked to assist external authorities with the investigation.
3. **Study-Abroad Students:** Special procedures have been established to handle potentially missing students in the Stetson University study-abroad programs. Under university guidelines that are applicable to students traveling in study-abroad programs, any travel from the program housing location must be provided, in writing and in advance, to the resident director. The resident director will follow up in an attempt to locate any student who fails to return, in a timely manner, from planned trips or otherwise appears to have gone missing. The Campus Life and Student Success staff members will work closely with the department of International Learning on addressing all and any safety concerns regarding international travel and learning. The follow up will include contacting the U.S. Embassy and law enforcement officials if necessary.
4. **Students Traveling for University Activities:** On occasion, students travel in connection with Stetson University-sponsored activities, such as competitions, professional organization activities, and the like. In those instances, the Faculty/Staff member in charge of the trip is responsible for collecting confidential emergency information and enforcing procedures for monitoring the whereabouts of students. If a student appears to have gone missing, the Faculty/Staff member will notify local law enforcement and Public Safety as necessary.

## **B. Reporting Procedures**

1. Any individual who believes that a residential student is missing should report that concern to the Public Safety Department.
2. Any Faculty or Staff member outside of Public Safety Department who receives such a report will immediately pass the information on to the Public Safety Department.
3. The Public Safety Department, upon receiving the report, will first check to see if the student has been approved for absence or has made contact with a Staff

member for approved reasons to be away. If the student's absence is not accounted for, or the duration of reported absence exceeds the time period stated in the *Notice*, Public Safety will initiate an investigation and will attempt to obtain all reasonably necessary information. This will typically include descriptions of the students and what they were wearing when last seen, any individuals with whom the student may be, vehicle description, information about the student's habits and patterns, and any concerns about the student's physical or mental well-being. Public Safety will obtain a photo, if available; the student's class schedule and emergency contact information and student's housing assignment from Banner.

4. Public Safety will conduct a quick, but thorough, search of campus buildings, campus-owned residential facilities, and parking lots. Public Safety will also check access card logs to determine the last time the student's I.D. card was used to gain access to a building or to purchase a meal and to review surveillance videos where prudent. Public Safety will notify appropriate campus staff to aid in the search for the student as needed, and will contact known friends and acquaintances to try to ascertain the student's whereabouts.
5. If Public Safety determines from the report (e.g., witness abduction) that the student is a missing person, or when the search efforts described above do not locate the student, Public Safety will contact appropriate local law enforcement agency to report the student as a missing person. The local law enforcement agency will then take charge of the investigation.
6. No later than 24 hours after determining that a residential student is missing, Stetson University-through the Office of Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, unless otherwise designated, will notify the student's emergency contact (for students 18 and over) or the parent/guardian (for students under 18).

### **C. Possible Missing Student Outcomes**

Multiple outcomes are possible in the case of a missing student. The three most likely possibilities are:

1. **After a search, the student is safe and well:** In this situation, Public Safety will contact the individual who reported the student as missing and give them basic assurances without disclosing confidential information.
2. **After a search, the student is in difficulty:** Public Safety will obtain as much information as possible about the student's difficulty, offer assistance as appropriate, and refer the matter to the Counseling Center for further assessment

and support. If the student is in any immediate danger, Public Safety will contact local law enforcement.

3. **After a search, the student does not respond:** If all efforts to contact a student have been exhausted and Stetson University has been unable to verify that the student is safe, Public Safety will notify local law enforcement. The Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students will be responsible notification of the student's emergency contact (for students 18 and over) or the parent/guardian (for students under 18).

#### **D. Registration of Emergency Contact Information and Notice of Absences**

1. **Designation of Emergency Contact:** Residential students-when signing up for housing online are required to provide the name and phone number of one individual that the University will contact in case of an emergency. The designated individual will be the emergency contact under this policy. On-Campus residents may update and change this emergency contact information may update their emergency contact information by logging into their MyStetson.edu account. The designation on file will remain in effect until changed by the student. Each semester, prior to registration, students will be required to enter emergency contact information. This is required for all students.
2. **Annual Notification to Residential Students:** The Department of Residential Living and Learning will send notification of this policy to Residential students.

#### **E. Campus Communications**

1. **In General:** In cases involving missing persons, law enforcement personnel are typically best suited to provide information to the media that is designed to elicit public assistance in the search. Therefore, unless otherwise approved by the Emergency Management Team, communications regarding missing students generally will be handled by outside law enforcement authorities. Internal communication to the University community (other than Security Alerts issued by the Public Safety Department) will generally be handled by the Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students or their designee.
2. **Outside Inquiries:** All inquiries to Stetson University regarding missing students, or information provided to any individual at the University about a missing student, will be referred to Public Safety. Public Safety will determine whether to handle and/or refer to law enforcement any such inquiries and information.

3. **Responding to Other Students:** It is often possible that other students will be anxious about the “missing student.” In such circumstance, the Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students will, in collaboration with Public Safety Department, will coordinate education about personal safety, to the extent appropriate, let students know what effort is being made to locate the missing student, and provide emotional support and counseling referrals as warranted.

#### **F. Options to Consider**

1. Consider having Public Safety pull up vehicle information and check to see if the person’s vehicle is parked on campus property.
2. Consider if checking swipe card access is needed. Consult with Dining Services to see if meal cards were used recently.
3. Checking social networking can assist with identifying a group of friends to inquire about the person’s latest behavior or demeanor. If possible, see when the last posts were made. Recognize that if left logged in those posts could not have come from student missing.
4. When students reside off-campus it may be difficult to find an address. Consider checking vehicle registration or utilizing friend groups. The local authorities may be assistance if needed.