**WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**

**MISSING PERSON NOTIFICATION POLICY**

(Final Draft – 4-30-10)

**I. GENERAL POLICY STATEMENT**

Western Carolina University (“WCU”) regards the safety and security of the members of our Campus Community as the highest priority. This policy contains the official notification procedures for WCU concerning missing students who reside in on-campus housing, in accordance with the requirements of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA). The purpose of this policy is to promote the safety and welfare of members of the university community through compliance with HEOA requirements and should be adhered to by all WCU faculty, staff, and students.

**II. INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED TO STUDENTS**

A. Required Notices to Students. The following information will be provided to students who reside in on-campus housing by publication on the University Police Department web page, the Division of Student Affairs/Residential Living web pages, as well as other appropriate WCU web pages and printed materials:

 1. Confidential Contact Registration. In addition to registering emergency contacts, students residing in on-campus housing have the option to register a different individual to serve as the confidential contact who will be notified by WCU no later than 24 hours after the student is determined to be missing. Students may register the name of their confidential contact as provided in Section III of this policy.

 2. Information to Students under the Age of 18. If a student who is under the age of 18 and not emancipated is determined to be missing in accordance with this policy, WCU is required to notify a custodial parent or legal guardian no later than 24 hours after the student is determined to be missing.

 3. UPD Notification of Confidential Contact. Missing persons reports will be immediately referred to the WCU University Police Department (“UPD”) for investigation. If UPD has been notified and makes a determination that a student in residence has been missing for more than 24 hours and has not returned to campus, WCU will initiate the missing persons contact procedures in accordance with the student’s designation.

**III. REGISTRATION OF CONFIDENTIAL CONTACT**

Students who wish to identify a confidential contact can do so by completing the appropriate registration forms during Residential Living check-in procedures. Registration will be accomplished through MY CAT on the WCU Student Information System (“Banner”). Students will be responsible for updating confidential contact information in Banner.

**IV. INVESTIGATION AND OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES**

A. Definition of “Missing”. A student may be considered "missing" when his or her location is unknown and unexplainable for a period of time that is regarded by knowledgeable parties as highly unusual or suspicious in consideration of the student’s usual behavior patterns, plans or routines.

B. Report to UPD that a Student is Missing / Investigation. In the event that a member of the university community has reason to believe that a student who resides in on-campus housing is missing, he/she should immediately notify UPD. UPD will generate a missing person report and initiate an investigation. In addition, UPD will report the alleged missing person to Residential Living if such information has not already been conveyed. The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, the Student Crisis Response Team Coordinator, and the Vice Chancellor of Finance and Administration will be notified that a student has been reported missing and that an investigation is under way.

The UPD will have primary investigative responsibility for students residing on campus. In the event a missing person report involves a student who does not reside in on-campus housing, UPD will assist the primary law enforcement agency having jurisdiction. During the course of the investigation, UPD will determine if the student has been missing, as that term is defined in this policy, for more than 24 hours. UPD will conduct the investigation utilizing law enforcement best practices including but not limited to:

* Interviews of friends, family, faculty, staff, and classmates;
* Entry of missing person information into state and federal databases of missing persons;
* Notification to other local law enforcements agencies;
* Physical searches of the WCU campus; and
* Inquiries to local hospitals.

In an attempt to obtain lead information, family members *may*also be interviewed by investigators to assist in locating the missing student.

C. Official Notification of Confidential Contact. In the event UPD determines through its investigation that the subject student has been missing for more than 24 hours, UPD must notify the student’s confidential contact. If the missing student is under the age of 18 and is not an emancipated individual, UPD must immediately contact the student’s parent or legal guardian. If a missing student, over the age of 18, has not identified a confidential contact, UPD will inform the appropriate law enforcement agencies that the student is missing and may notify others as appropriate, including the student’s emergency contact listed in BANNER. Notwithstanding the foregoing, UPD may inform appropriate law enforcement agencies at any time when circumstances warrant. Also, in certain circumstances, UPD may contact a student’s family, friends, and/or the confidential contact prior to expiration of the 24 hour period.

**V. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS**

WCU’s Office of Public Relations is responsible for coordinating any media releases or campus wide notifications in coordination with the Chief of Police and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. When a student has been located, law enforcement authorities will determine the circumstances surrounding the student’s absence. Family members, reporting individuals, the confidential contact, and the campus community will be advised of the student’s well-being. Absent any criminal matters the student’s current location will only be released with their consent and at their request.