

# **A Faculty Guide to Academic Continuity In Case of Campus Emergency or Course Disruption**

(Based on information provided by the Academic and Research Continuity Sub-Committee of Purdue University West Lafayette Pandemic Plan Committee)

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## **A. Guidelines for Faculty in case of campus emergency or course disruption**

When designing courses and preparing syllabi it is important to think about how you might manage a personal or campus-wide emergency which interrupts the normal operation of classes for an extended period. In recent years examples of such interruptions have followed hurricanes along the coast, the floods at Indiana Northwest, and the shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois. The academic mission of the university would be impacted in any emergency situation, whether it is a severe winter storm, a tornado, a utilities grid failure or pandemic influenza, or a personal health issue that prevents an instructor from being on campus for a prolonged time (the instructor must discuss this issue with the department chair and Human Resources.) In some scenarios, the situation could even be complicated by an extended suspension of classes, and in extreme cases, even the shortening of the semester.

This document is intended to suggest several strategies that will help make adjustments easier and avoid problems should they arise. These are general strategies. Departments also need to prepare for issues specific to their discipline, such as clinical courses or student teaching. Since we are unable to predict when emergencies will happen, or when they might impact the PNC campus, implementation is recommended immediately.

### **1. Include the following statement in the syllabus or course policies of each course that you teach.**

In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances. Here are ways to get information about changes in this course. Blackboard Vista web page, my email address: xxxxx@pnc.edu, and my office phone: 219-785-xxxx. If the campus is without power for an extended period, there will be no access to Blackboard, e-mail or phones. Therefore, PNC's emergency text message system will be utilized.

*Rationale:* This paragraph alerts students that in an emergency situation the professor may need to adjust the requirements of the course and the grading strategy. It should help reduce the number of grade appeals that could result from any adjustments that may be need to made if the semester length is modified as a result of an emergency. It puts students on alert that they also need to spread their effort across the entire semester.

### **2. Have multiple means of contacting students.**

*Rationale:* If classes are suspended, an instructor must try to contact students to provide them with assignment materials or information about the course. It is wise to have multiple means of contacting students. IS sets up course e-mail systems for each student in every class at the beginning of the semester for all instructors – Class (Admin) in the GroupWise address book; this is a very simple way for an instructor to stay in contact with the students in a class and for students to communicate with their instructor. Therefore, instructors should encourage students to set up their e-mail account within the first week of the semester. The PNC e-mail system is the campus default communication system; accordingly all instructional staff must use their PNC e-mail account. Faculty may wish to establish a backup email address for reaching students in the event of damage to campus infrastructure. *These alternative e-mail accounts are free and generally provide unlimited mailbox storage, but again this should only be used in emergency situations.*

- G-Mail: <http://www.gmail.com>
- Hotmail: <http://www.hotmail.com>
- Yahoo: <http://www.yahoo.com>

### **3. Set up a Blackboard Vista site for each course.**

Set up a Blackboard Vista site for each course, including independent studies. Begin by posting course materials on the course site so they could be available to students as needed. e.g. syllabus, copies of readings, assignments, etc. Instructors may want to add lecture notes or PowerPoint slides for work students could do outside of the classroom in the event of a temporary suspension of classes. Vista allows instructors to load materials and hold their release until a specific date. Another technology option is for faculty to make use of Adobe Connect to conduct their classes. For more information on this, contact Judy Serwatka.

*Rationale:* Should classes be suspended, Blackboard Vista will be a primary way instructors can communicate with students in the interim and provide an equitable access point to course information.

### **4. Review the grading structure of each course and try balancing it across the semester.**

*Rationale:* In the event of an emergency suspension, it may become necessary to shorten the semester. In that situation, instructors will want to avoid a situation where a high percentage of the student's grade cannot be accomplished because it was due at the end of the semester. A review of the course grading structure will help to identify potential problems and allow for adjustments so that the distribution of grading points can be made more evenly across the semester. In some courses, the last few weeks and especially the final are very heavily weighted and this could cause real problems if the semester were suddenly concluded early in response to an emergency.

### **5. Examine course attendance policy.**

*Rationale:* Some faculty require and reward attendance as part of the grade in a course in order to encourage attendance and reward students for participation in the class. However, in the case of a health emergency, it is in everyone's best interests that ill or exposed students NOT be in class since they could potentially infect others. In addition, if there were a pandemic outbreak in which mortality rates were higher than normal, individual students may be faced with the situation in which they would be attending multiple funerals or have significant family

issues. In these situations, grading for attendance may become part of the problem since it would encourage students to be in class even if they should not be, and it might unfairly disadvantage grieving and recovering students. For these reasons, we recommend that any attendance and “make-up” policies instructors may have for their classes be reviewed and alternatives be considered. Put them in place prior to an emergency so that they are ready for use in an emergency.

Given the expectation that children will be disproportionately likely to be effected by Swine Flu in the fall which could lead to school and day care closures, faculty must be flexible with parents in terms of missing class if a school in the area closes for the flu and about cell phones being on in class if there is an outbreak in the area.

**6. Back up critical grading records.**

A backup set of grades is recommended. On-line grade books and even electronic spreadsheets may become unavailable under some emergency suspension situations. For peace of mind, instructors may want to have those grades backed up somewhere secure and off-line. Consider a thumb drive or spreadsheet printout. Keeping FERPA requirements in mind be sure the backup is kept secure so student privacy rights are not violated. FERPA guidelines can be found at: <http://www.pnc.edu/cd/policy/privacy.html>

**7. Post any changes on a Blackboard Vista website for each course.**

*Rationale:* If instructors find it necessary to make changes in the course schedule, grading structure, etc. during the semester as a result of a suspension of classes for emergency, it would be good practice to post information about those changes on the course Vista webpage so that students who may not be able to return to class immediately will have the information as well as those students who may receive a handout. An alternative would be to e-mail a copy of the information to all students in the class.

**8. Be prepared to work from home.**

In the event that the university responds to a pandemic with an emergency closure, or the local schools close and instructors find it necessary to do more work from home than usual, or you are injured or ill, you may want to be prepared with an internet connection so you can manage your work remotely. It is also a good practice to have necessary materials ready to take home on short notice.

*Rationale:* If university operations were disrupted, instructors may not be permitted to get materials from campus buildings, may need to stay home for family reasons, or may be asked to remain home for safety reasons.

**9. Prepare your household to ride out any emergency including a pandemic.**

Local health officials are currently recommending that all residents prepare for the worst case scenario of a severe pandemic influenza that may last for an extended period of time when residents may be confined to home, businesses may close, or there will be shortages. Needless to say, this is good advice in event of any emergency. For more information on household preparedness, see: <http://www.redcross.org>.

## B. Emergency Planning Information Guide for Researchers

### **Mitigating the effects of disasters on your research**

This article is from *Research Review*, Sept. 2007 edition

Fires, floods tornados, hurricanes, bomb scares, campus shootings... the list of disasters that can affect or have affected universities is long. We should also be prepared for a pandemic. In a severe one, campuses could be closed for long periods of time, as happened after Hurricane Katrina. Such emergencies require considerable adaptation on the part of researchers in order to carry on vital research, preserve valuable research assets, and protect personnel.

Fortunately, advance preparations will help mitigate the negative impacts of disasters and will protect both people and assets. With September designated as national Preparedness Month, this article points out a few basic steps you can take now to save you time, anxiety, and loss later on.

Here's a basic list.

- Step 1. Protect your data.** Regularly copy important files and keep the copies in multiple locations. One broken pipe above your computer could be a costly set-back to your work.
- Step 2. Identify your most valuable assets.** How would you manage your animals, cell lines, or irreplaceable items in an emergency? Have you arranged for a back-up location in case the power fails in your building or on campus? Do you have access to generator power? If you had to choose, how would you prioritize your assets? These arrangements and plans should be made now so that if an emergency arises, anyone in your area knows what needs to be done and can follow a checklist to do it.
- Step 3. Plan for building damage.** What would be most important to salvage from your office or lab? Make a list and keep a copy in a safe place – outside of the building. Where could these materials be relocated?
- Step 4. Plan for absences.** In a health emergency, your staff may be ill or need to care for children home from school. Consider training staff to cover for each other, and identify work-at-home activities.
- Step 5. Plan for a campus closure.** In a pandemic, the campus may need to shut down. It would be wise to make a checklist for closing down your operations, and for restarting them at the end of the emergency.

Research shows that successful recovery from disaster requires this sort of planning beforehand. To assist your planning, the Purdue Pandemic Preparedness Committee has assembled a list of best practices for instructors and researchers. You can find it at <http://www.itap.purdue.edu/tlt/faculty/guidelines.cfm>

In addition the emergency preparedness Web site can be located at: [http://www.purdue.edu/emergency\\_preparedness/](http://www.purdue.edu/emergency_preparedness/)

Recovery also requires good decisions as the disaster unfolds. Involve your research staff in addressing these issues and planning so that if your team is faced with an emergency, you know what needs to be done and are prepared to do it.