The number of Internet technologies available for use in teaching, learning, and research, continues to grow by leaps and bounds. Many faculty today are using a combination of technologies including course management systems, web conferencing, blogs, virtual worlds, wikis, and a wide variety of social media to achieve learning outcomes. When planning your course, it is important to think about student and instructor expectations and activities in the unlikely event that one or more of course technologies are not available. Your course syllabus should communicate this information to your students.

As with any technology, Blackboard, Saba Meeting, and other Internet based learning technologies have the potential for technical problems. A team of Blackboard personnel in ITCS monitor ECU approved tools and respond 24/7 to restore service. You may encounter two types of problems with Internet based technologies: complete failure in which the system is not accessible, or slowdown that renders the system unusable.

To report problems please notify the ECU Help Desk at:

To prepare for potential problems and/or downtime, we advise all instructors using Blackboard, Saba Meeting, or other Internet based technologies, to have a contingency plan in place that will be used when the technology is not available. A contingency plan involves anticipating and planning for an alternate delivery of course material and communication with students during a service interruption. Your contingency plan should appear on your course syllabus to ensure that students know their responsibilities, the timelines, and alternative means to meet requirements during a downtime situation. This document contains situations for you to consider, contingency plan suggestions, and helpful information to provide your students.

Consider the Following Before Creating Your DE Contingency Plan:

- How will you communicate with your students? If Blackboard is not available, you can email your students outside of Blackboard using the Email Class feature within Banner. Click here to see the steps to use the Email Class feature. Update students on prolonged outages and course assignments and requirements status. It may be helpful to ask students to clearly identify course info in the subject line of emails during the contingency period e.g. ITEC 3000 Section 001 Assignment 4. You can then use an email filter to automatically sort student emails to a specific folder to more efficiently manage your inbox.
If you have a synchronous session scheduled audio, video, or chat tool is not available consider the following. How long do you want your students to attempt to log in – 15 minutes, 30 minutes, or the entire scheduled session? What should students do if they are not able to access the chat? How will they know when the synchronous session is rescheduled? How and when will you contact them after such a situation occurs?

What if a scheduled online exam is not available due to a technology failure? Do you want students to contact you if they are not able to access or complete an online exam? How will this down time affect the exam due date? How and when will you contact them with a new due date?

What if Blackboard is not available and your students have an assignment due and that would be submitted via the assignment tool? Do you want students to notify you if they are not able to access the assignment tool? Will you ask them to submit such an assignment via email? How will this downtime affect the due date? How and when will you contact them after such a situation occurs?

What if students are not able to access online course content? Do you want your students to notify you if they are not able to access online course content? How will such an incident affect the due dates for any assignments? If the content is not accessible for an entire weekend; will that automatically give students 2 extra days, or even an additional weekend to complete an assignment/exam? How and when will you contact your students after such a situation occurs?

What if the Internet based tool is available, but is running so slow that it is unusable? Will this situation be handled any differently than downtime?

How will any of the situations above alter your semester course schedule? Will you have to delete a lesson/unit or speed up the pace?

What can your students expect from you when their Internet based course is not available?

What do you expect from your students when their Internet based course is not available?

Faculty DE Contingency Plan Suggestions

Define situations that would trigger the Contingency plan to action. Will your DE Contingency Plan be implemented if your Internet based course is down a few hours, 24 hours, 48 hours, etc.? Assure your students that they will hear from you if the Course downtime is 24 hours or greater.
DE Contingency Plan:
For Internet Based Teaching Tools
Provided by: Emerging Academic Initiatives

- Have your syllabus, timeline, and course content available to email students.
- Encourage students to download relevant information and store it locally.
- Back up your course on your computer.
- Create a file of course information organized in a format that can be easily emailed.
- Inform your students of office hours you will be available during an extended downtime.

Inform Students of Your DE Contingency Plan
Include the DE Contingency Plan in your course syllabus. Explain the plan to your students. Let them know when it should be implemented.

To get you started developing your DE Contingency Plan, you may want to include this information in your syllabus:

As with any technology, Blackboard, Saba Meeting and other Internet based teaching tools have the potential for technical problems. We like to think this technology will be available to you all semester. To prepare for course downtime or a performance issue that makes the system speed unusable, I encourage you to:

1. Save and/or print a copy of the syllabus, assignment schedule, and course material available.
2. Save my email address (insert email) so that you are able to contact me as necessary.
3. Save names of fellow classmates, so that you may contact each other through Piratemail or other third party email.
4. Determine that the problem is with Blackboard/Internet based course site and not your Internet Service Provider. Visit your favorite web site or www.ecu.edu, if these pages are available, then more than likely it is a Blackboard/Internet based course site problem.

Class activities that may be affected by course downtime and your responsibilities:

- If the Internet course site is not available during a scheduled synchronous session, you are required to attempt log in (number of minutes). For example, if a class chat is scheduled to begin at 12 noon, you must try to log into the chat until (12:XX). If you are not able to log into the chat session after the stated time, then… (How will they know when the chat will be rescheduled? How and when will you contact them after such a situation occurs?)

- If you are not able to take an online exam, then….. (Do you want students to contact you if they are not able to access an online exam? How will this downtime affect the exam due date? How and when will you contact them with a new due date?)
• If Blackboard is not available and you have an assignment to submit via the assignment tool, then…. (Do you want students to notify you if they are not able to access the assignment tool? Will you ask them to submit such an assignment via email? Will this down time affect the due date? How and when will you contact them after such a situation occurs?)

• If the Internet course site is not available and you are not able to access course content, then… (Do you want your students to notify you if they are not able to access course content? How will such an incident affect the due dates for any assignments? Say the Internet course site is down an entire weekend, will that give students 2 extra days, or even an additional weekend to complete an assignment/exam? How and when will you contact your students after such a situation occurs?)

• How will any of the situations above affect your student’s grades? They may need reassurance that downtime will not affect their grade.

• How will any of the situations above alter your semester course schedule? Will you have to delete a lesson or unit?

• Contact me (insert email) if you have any questions about your responsibilities as a student during an Internet based course downtime.

In the event that we do experience Internet based course downtime, you can expect me to…… (Describe your responsibilities as the instructor, such as email communication).

Contact Information:  
As the instructor, provide your:  
- Phone number  
- Email address  
- Office hours  
- Alternate office hours during Internet course downtime

http://www.ecu.edu/eai/