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DE Contingency Plan: For Internet Based Teaching Tools Provided by Academic Outreach

~DE Contingency Plan~

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 more to achieve learning outcomes. When planning your course it is important to think about student and instructor expectations in the unlikely event that one or more of course technologies are not available. Your course syllabus is a good place to communicate this information to your students.

As with any technology, Blackboard and other Internet based technologies have the potential for technical problems. As soon as we are aware of Blackboard problems and/or downtime, a team of Academic Outreach, ITCS, and Blackboard personnel respond day or night to restore service. There are two types of technical problems you may encounter with Internet based technologies: complete downtime where the system is not accessible or a speed so slow the system is unusable.

In addition to Blackboard, Academic Outreach also introduces several pilot projects during the year. The purpose of a pilot project is to test software/hardware and introduce options to faculty, staff, and students. The pilot tools introduced will not have 24/7 support and users will not be able to call the ITCS Help Desk during the pilot period for resolution of problems. Academic Outreach will provide support Monday through Friday from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm or after hours and weekends by individual request.

To prepare for potential problems and/or downtime, we strongly advise all instructors using Blackboard or other Internet based technologies to have a contingency plan when the technology is not available. A contingency plan involves anticipating and planning for an alternate delivery of course material and communication when a service interruption occurs. Your contingency plan should appear on your course syllabus so that students know their responsibilities and what to expect in 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 will have to email your students outside of Blackboard. You can email all of your students using the Email Class feature within Banner. [Click here to see the steps to use the Email Class feature.](#) Consider when you want to email students to inform or update them on course status. You should consider using an email filter to automatically send status related emails to a specific folder to help manage your inbox. Instruct your students to use an appropriate subject line, for example ITEC 3000 Section 001 Blackboard.

- What to Consider
- Suggestions
- Inform Students

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- You have a **synchronous chat** scheduled to begin at 12 noon and the chat tool is not available. How long do you want your students to attempt to log in – 15 minutes, 30 minutes, or even the entire chat session? Do you want them to notify you if they are not able to access the chat? How will they know when the chat will be rescheduled? How and when will you contact them after such a situation occurs?
- What if an online exam is not available for students to take an **exam**? 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 to submit via the **digital drop box**? Do you want students to notify you if they are not able to access the digital drop box? 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? Say the content is not accessible for 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?
- What if the Internet based system is available, but 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 what situation would trigger this 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.
- Use the Email Class feature in Banner email as a contact tool if Blackboard service is down, this will allow you to email your entire course roster. [Click here to see the steps to use the Email Class feature.](#)

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- Have your syllabus, timeline, and course content available to email students.
- Back up your course on your computer (will not have Blackboard or obvious navigation)
- 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, the following is information you may want to copy and paste into your syllabus:

As with any technology, Blackboard 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 chat**, 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 in to the chat until (12:XX). If you are not able to log in to 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?)

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- If Blackboard is not available and you have an assignment to submit via the **digital drop box**, then.... (Do you want students to notify you if they are not able to access the digital drop box? 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

