

UMUC Classroom Interruption Planning Guide

*For managing unplanned
classroom closings*

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I. Introduction

The Classroom Interruption Planning Guide provides specific steps and tips for faculty who teach online and face-to-face classes at UMUC. The Guide outlines UMUC stateside faculty preparedness activities that will allow teaching and learning to continue if a physical or computer-based disruption prevents or restricts normal communications with students. It addresses resources, support, and faculty and student awareness before and during classroom closings as well as the necessary steps for returning to normal operations.

Please review this Guide carefully and keep a hard copy on hand with you at all times. The better prepared we are as faculty when there is an emergency closing of classrooms and/or services for our students, the better we will be able to handle such closings and continue teaching in an alternate format so that our students can continue to learn with as little disruption as possible.

This Guide is not a new set of policies but one that serves more as a repository of tips and suggestions that could be useful to faculty during a semester when an interruption occurs in accessing our learning management system.

TIP: Sign Up for MyAlerts

It's a good idea to sign up for UMUC's emergency communication system, MyAlerts, at <https://alert.umuc.edu> to have emergency alerts and notifications sent directly to any device that includes texting (cell phone, e-mail account, PDA, or pager). By signing up for this service, you will be informed of severe weather, closings, and other local or national emergencies. Alerts that apply to specific UMUC locations will be noted as such in the opening sentence of the messaging.

Scope

UMUC takes great care to minimize events that could disrupt classroom activities while keeping student and faculty safety in mind. Some events, however, are beyond our control, and this Guide identifies alternative methods for faculty-student communications in the following scenarios:

- WebTycho is inaccessible for more than 24 hours.

Planned downtime for WebTycho typically affects only one or two servers at a time; this downtime is always announced via Systems Announcements on the class list screen (after login). WebTycho may be taken offline for emergency updates, maintenance, or repairs and while unlikely, it may not be brought back online within the timeframe specified in the System Announcements (for planned downtime) or within 24 hours. You can use this Guide in these rare instances to help you continue teaching and communicating with your students. Since this Guide does not address planned downtime, faculty and students should make a habit of checking WebTycho Systems Announcements at each login.

- Physical classrooms are inaccessible for more than one meeting.

For physical class locations, notifications of classroom issues are posted in advance usually through e-mail notification and announcement posts on the classroom entrance doors. This Guide addresses only the inaccessibility of classrooms that cause a disruption for more than one class meeting. In all likelihood, if a physical space were unavailable, the instructor would use the WebTycho classroom as an alternative. If WebTycho were also unavailable, the face-to-face instructor would use the information listed in this Guide.

- Library services are unavailable.

Online Library services may be taken offline for planned or emergency updates, maintenance, or repairs and not be brought back online within the timeframe specified in the Information and Library Services announcements (<http://www.umuc.edu/library/library.shtml>). **Appendix B** of this Guide discusses such conditions and what can be done to accommodate students.

- Regional or localized events affect availability.

Faculty and students may lose Internet connectivity due to regional or localized events. Likewise, UMUC's connectivity, IT infrastructure, or classroom space (regardless of location) may be affected (closed) due to regional or localized events. Numerous strategies for alternate communications with students are outlined in this Guide when external issues such as these arise.

Note that WebTycho has an excellent track record of availability; it is typically up and running 100 percent of the time. In recent years, there has been only one unplanned outage, in 2007, due to application changes, spanning a few days of intermittent usability. The guidelines in this document would serve as a classroom continuity and communication plan during a similar outage or one that may be caused by external forces, such as those mentioned above.

II. General Planning for Potential Classroom Interruptions

To help ensure academic continuity in the event of a classroom interruption, you should perform these critical tasks prior to the start of your class:

- ❑ Record student names, e-mail addresses, and phone contact information.
- ❑ Document e-mail and phone number of directors or administrator points of contact for your primary program or department.
- ❑ Make a working copy of the WebTycho Gradebook.
- ❑ Back up conference discussion topics, assignments, and other critical teaching materials.

These tasks are identical for online, hybrid, and other course formats, regardless of the duration of the course. In addition, there are several tips you can follow throughout the semester to further prepare for classroom continuity should an interruption occur.

Prior to the Start of the First Class

Record Student Contact Information

Approximately one day before the semester starts, go to MyUMUC to download the student contact information for each of your students. Follow these steps to retrieve the contact information:

- Log into MyUMUC at <https://my.umuc.edu>.
- Follow this menu path: Faculty Self-Service > My Academics > Class List > Access Class Rosters. As shown in Figure 1, the Access Class Rosters application allows you to select the current semester.

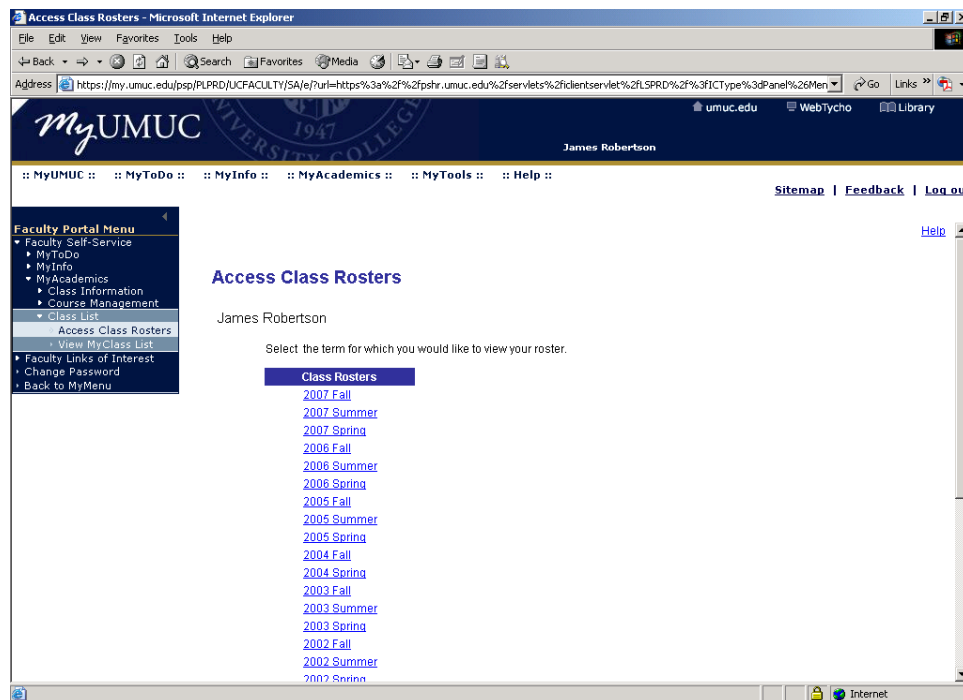


Figure 1. Access Class Rosters application.

- Click on the semester you would like to display. The specific sections you have been assigned to teach will be listed, as shown in Figure 2.

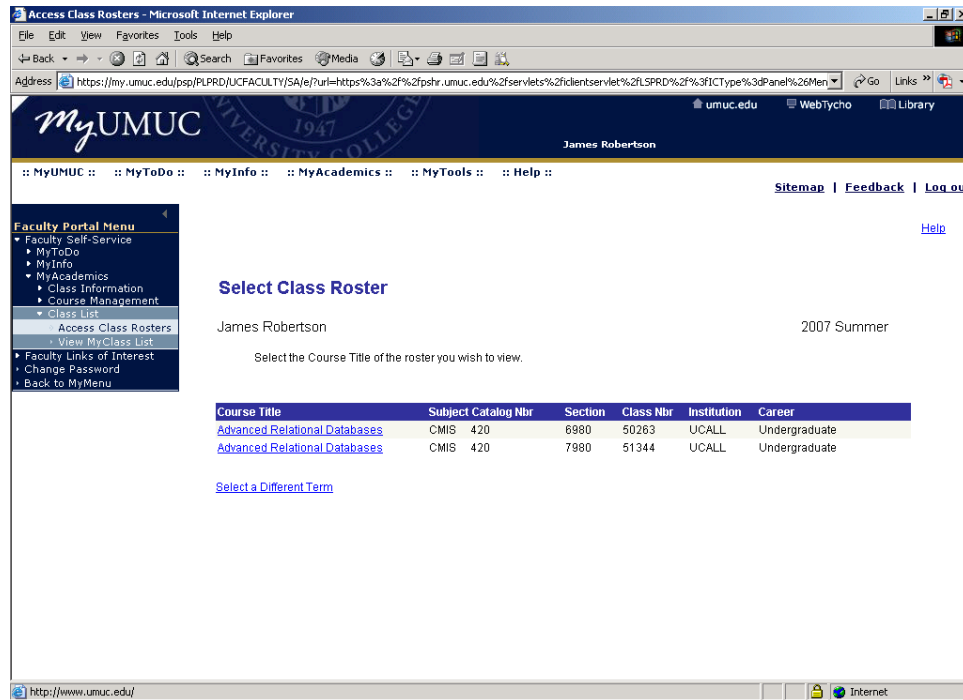


Figure 2. Select Class Roster application.

- To display student names and their contact information, select the section and then click on the “Student Contact Information” link near the top of the page. A list will appear showing each student’s name, ID number, preferred e-mail address, and phone number.
- Print this list or copy and paste it into Notepad, an Excel spreadsheet, or another document. It is recommended that you save this list until all grades have been entered at the end of the semester. **Be sure to store student identification and other sensitive information in a location where its security will not be jeopardized, and promptly destroy this information when all legitimate educational interests have ended.**
- If you haven’t already done so, be sure to review UMUC’s official policy on Disclosure of Student Record at <http://www.umuc.edu/policy/academic/aa21014.shtml>.

TIP: Test Student E-mail Addresses

Create a distribution list based on your students’ WebTycho e-mail contact information and send a test message to the students in your class. This test message will help you identify any possible problems with spam filters or firewalls that may block your e-mails. If this should occur, ask the students to add you to their approved recipient list.

Document UMUC Contact Information

Keep a record of the name(s), e-mail address(es), and phone number(s) of your director and/or course administrator. Use this information to communicate with your specific points of contact in case you no longer have access to WebTycho or your director’s online contact information.

Also record the WebTycho online support site (<http://support.umuc.edu>) and toll-free contact number (**888-360-UMUC**) as well as the weather/emergency hotline (**301-985-SNOW**).

Prepare a Copy of Your WebTycho Gradebook

In the same backup document you created to record student contact information, create an additional space for temporarily entering student grades. You should update this area each time the primary WebTycho Gradebook is updated. This redundancy will ensure continuity of grading and reporting to students and administrators if the primary WebTycho Gradebook is not available for an extended period of time. Note that the Gradebook retains the most recent information saved to it, so it is important to keep it up to date. **Be sure to treat your backup grading area as just that—a backup. As long as the WebTycho Gradebook is available, you are expected to use it to enter grades every time a student submits a graded assignment.**

TIP: Copy the Gradebook into Excel

You may want to consider copying your Gradebook into an Excel worksheet to use as a backup file. To do this, follow these steps:

1. Use your mouse to select all the text in the Gradebook Overview.
2. Press **Ctrl+C** to copy the selected text.
3. Open a new Excel worksheet.
4. Select **Paste Special > HTML Format** to paste the selected text into the worksheet.
5. Save your new Excel file.

Back Up Teaching Materials

In most cases, faculty already have original copies of critical teaching materials as they were likely used to set up the WebTycho classroom. If WebTycho is down for an extended period of time, you will not have access to online course modules, conferences, assignments, and other course-related materials. Proper planning suggests that you copy, organize, and save **all critical teaching materials, including lectures, assignments and instructions, quizzes, conference discussion topics, the syllabus, schedule, and other artifacts as needed.** You will then be able to provide these materials to your students in the absence of WebTycho. During the semester, when changes are made, be diligent to ensure that your offline and online copies remain synchronized. You may not be able to save some materials such as reserved readings, library resources, etc. See **Appendix B** for more information on accessing those items during an outage.

Once Class Has Begun

When your class begins, it will help you and your students to be better prepared for a classroom interruption if you follow these tips:

- At the beginning of the semester, send students a welcome e-mail blast with your contact information and ask them to save the e-mail. Maintain a copy for your own records. This practice will ensure that both you and your students have each other's e-mails.

- When the class starts, let all students know that it is critical for them to maintain current e-mail and contact information in MyUMUC throughout the semester. Verify on a regular basis that you have the right contact information for all the students and make changes to your information sheet as needed. **Be sure to destroy this information when all legitimate educational interests have ended.**
- Make it a practice to include your telephone number and e-mail address at the end of all e-mails so that students have ready access to your contact information.
- Remind students early on to download and print out a hard copy of the syllabus. Follow this practice for yourself as well.
- Remind students regularly about the importance of keeping backup electronic copies of their assignments.
- Retain a copy of your personal materials on some backup media.
- Back up conferences that contain critical information which cannot be reproduced.
- If you are teaching in WebTycho, you may want to download assignments when they are submitted so that you will always have ready access to them.
- For evaluating weekly conference participation in WebTycho, consider these three possible practices: (1) Assess student work regularly; (2) Download a copy of the student portfolios; (3) Ask students to maintain a compilation of their major conference postings and hold them responsible for submitting them for grading at specified times during the semester.
- Stay informed about other technologies you may need to use temporarily to continue teaching and learning activities if your classroom were to remain inaccessible for an extended period of time.

TIP: Explore Additional Technologies

Appendix A lists information about optional technologies and tools you may want to investigate and/or use if your classroom is interrupted. These tools are suggested only for backup alternatives and are not required for normal class activity.

In addition, if the entire data center is down and you are unable to use any UMUC-based applications such as Polaris or Nova e-mail/Web site accounts, please consult Appendix A for alternatives.

III. Classroom Continuity during an Interruption

If an unplanned closing occurs in the online or face-to-face classroom, following the suggested guidelines below will help ensure continuity of teaching and learning during the interruption. If you have any doubt about how to handle the situations and responsibilities discussed here, seek the advice of your director.

Continuity for Online Classes

Communication with Students

In the event of a classroom interruption, use the distribution list you created at the beginning of the semester to send an e-mail to students reminding them of when and how they may contact you. Use Exhibit A below as a sample e-mail to notify students of the interruption and to confirm that they have your contact information.

**Exhibit A: Sample Correspondence for Alerting Students
How to Reach You during the Emergency**

Dear students,

I am aware that you may not be able to access our WebTycho classroom. The university will notify us when it becomes available. In the meantime, we will rely mainly on e-mail for class communication. You will receive further instruction regarding upcoming assignments that are due in the immediate future. Remember, I am here to support you to ensure that learning, instruction, and completion of assignments continue.

Please contact me at psmith@gmail.com if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Professor Smith

Lecture Materials

If you post your own lectures and other materials on a weekly basis, you will want to find a way to continue doing this so that student learning is not compromised while WebTycho is unavailable. Here are some recommended practices:

- Continue timely sharing of lectures and supporting materials by using your backup copies.
- Save a copy of your personal materials on backup media.
- If you are using any common materials produced by your department but have not yet posted them, obtain them from your director.
- Send materials to students via e-mail.
- If a departmental Web site is available, consider posting your lectures there with the assistance of your director.
- In an extreme emergency, you can seek approval from your director to post class work on your external Web site.

TIP: Use Care when Sending Information over E-mail

When distributing class materials via e-mail—a non-secure medium—you need to use care and exercise the same security precautions that are already built into the secure WebTycho environment. You also need to keep concerns related to copyright permissions and password-protected information in mind. Contact your director if you are not sure about specific permissions.

Threaded Discussions and Other All-Class Activities

Many classes require student and faculty participation in online discussions and activities. An obvious alternative during an outage is to use e-mail. However, message overload and management can be challenging. Students relying on workplace e-mails may confront additional problems due to firewalls and/or spam blockers. Some classes can experience weekly posting volumes in the range of 100–200 messages; following discussions by e-mail will be extremely difficult, even when the number of contributors and messages is smaller.

Here are some practices to consider in consultation with your director in case of an outage:

- Excuse students from the requirement to interact and ask them instead to submit an individual contribution. Consult with your director to ensure that this does not constitute a substantial change in course requirements as described in the syllabus.
- Allocate subtopics to groups and then provide a summary document at the end of the week.
- Consider setting up a telephone conference call or using an instant messaging/chat program.
- If you adjust the requirements for interaction during the classroom interruption, prepare a synopsis of student submissions, add substantive comments, and send this information to all students via e-mail.

Assignment Completion

Follow these guidelines to effectively handle assignments when WebTycho is unavailable:

- Be prepared to send copies of your backed-up assignment information (from the syllabus or other teaching materials) to students.
- If you supplement assignment information with postings in the WebTycho classroom, send that additional information to students via e-mail.
- Consult with your director for guidance on adjustments to assignment due dates to guard against concerns that might arise from changed course schedules. Changes can create problems for students and result in unintended and unwanted inequities. It is likely that directors will advise liberal granting of extensions if interruptions in access pose problems for students in completing assignments.
- Students may need to submit assignments to you via e-mail. If they do so, it will be important to caution against the inclusion of any personal or organizational information of a confidential nature. If this is part of the assignment, then adjustments should be made to protect privacy if the work cannot be submitted to a password-protected site.

Grading and Feedback

Feedback is one of students' most valued forms of communication that directly discusses their progress in a course. Follow these guidelines to ensure that feedback as well as grading information is adequately maintained during a WebTycho outage:

- If assignments are due to be graded during a time when WebTycho is not available, use your Excel backup to enter individual grades and feedback for each student.
- Communicate the individual grading and feedback information to each student via e-mail.

TIP: Use Blogs and Wikis for Classroom Communication/Content Judiciously

If you already use a blog or wiki to supplement your WebTycho classroom, you may want to consider posting classroom communications and lecture materials or conducting student discussions in these spaces during a classroom interruption. While the use of Web 2.0 tools such as these is beyond the scope of this document, you should ensure that viewing and writing access is restricted to members of the class. Particularly in a wiki, you may also be able to create individual student pages with restricted page-level access so that each student has a private space for communicating with you and/or submitting an assignment—until WebTycho is available again.

Continuity for Face-to-Face Classes

If you have reason to believe that you will not have access to your on-site classroom because of inclement weather or some other situation, you should first check the 301-985-SNOW phone line or the UMUC weather/emergency information Web page at <http://www.umuc.edu/weather/>. If possible, it is also a good idea to contact the person who supervises the course to seek guidance about how to proceed.

In general, the advised course of action is to use the WebTycho classroom if the on-site facility is not accessible. A best practice is to set up your WebTycho classroom so that it is easy for you and your students to make this transition. This is easiest when students are accustomed to going to the classroom on a regular basis. Among the options you might consider are:

- Use the WebTycho study groups as a source of support for class teams.
- Post lectures and supplementary materials in the WebTycho classroom so that students are accustomed to visiting on a regular basis.
- Use the Assignments Folder for uploading feedback and grades, a practice that ensures students will visit the classroom and therefore be more likely to use it in the event that access to the on-site classroom is not possible.
- Open a "Q & A" Conference in the WebTycho classroom as a supplement.
- Use the announcements feature of the WebTycho classroom as a supplement to those offered during your class meetings.
- Use the WebTycho chat feature for weekly "office hours."
- The suggestions above assume that WebTycho is available. If WebTycho is inaccessible, you should follow the previously listed suggestions for online classroom continuity. However, in order to do so, you would have had to perform some of the suggestions made under Section II – General Planning for Potential Classroom Interruptions.

IV. Resuming Regular Classroom Activity

Most shutdowns or outages, even though they may be “long term” for purposes of this Guide, will likely not last the duration of the semester. While most of the resumption activities are self-evident, there are a few elements worth emphasizing for reestablishing normal academic routines.

Communication Plan

When preparing to resume normal classroom activities—whether online or face-to-face—students will be notified in two ways:

- **University-wide communication plan.** This plan is based upon the same policies and procedures that govern the university communications plan for weather and emergencies—it provides notification via the university Web site and emergency dial-in number when normal classroom activity is to be resumed.
- **Faculty-to-students e-mail plan.** When normal classroom activities are to be resumed, the academic deans will provide e-mail templates to all affected faculty. The faculty will then use these templates to provide additional notification to the students in their class via e-mail that normal class procedures are to resume. Use the student contact information sheet you created at the beginning of the class to send this information to your students.

Please note that you need to wait for official notification from your director that the WebTycho classroom is available—or, for face-to-face classes, wait for official notification—prior to using it again. Once official notification is obtained and the classroom checks out for complete access, follow the steps outlined below to resume normal classroom activities.

Resuming Online Classes

Communications

Inform students via e-mail and the class announcements page that class will resume in WebTycho. Prepare a message as in Exhibit B below to assure students that their grades will not suffer due to the outage and that you will post appropriate information into the classroom by a specific date.

Exhibit B: Sample Correspondence for Alerting Students that Class will Resume in WebTycho

Dear students,

WebTycho is up and running again, and we will continue with our ABCD111 class in our normal fashion, effective immediately. Please note that your grades will not suffer due to the WebTycho outage. I will post offline discussions in the classroom by October 10. In the meantime, resume your regular studies and conferencing within the WebTycho environment.

Please contact me at psmith@gmail.com if you have any questions or concerns or post them in the Questions conference.

Sincerely,
Professor Smith

When WebTycho is back online, prepare a communication (see Exhibit C below) to students to inform them of the actions you plan to take to resume the functioning online classroom, i.e., re-posting of grades, copies of offline conference threads, impact of the outage on due dates, etc. Remember, you must keep all related class/course materials for several months. Therefore, any materials used outside WebTycho during the outage also need to be retained.

**Exhibit C: Sample Correspondence Informing Students of Action Plan
for Reestablished WebTycho Classroom**

Dear students,

I appreciate everyone's commitment to learning and your patience as we were unable to connect with each other in our regular way. Now that we are back online in our WebTycho classroom, I ask for your continued patience as I sort out the remaining details over the next few days. Here is my plan for bringing us all up-to-date with our learning activities:

I will repost grades for Assignment 2 by October 9. While I have made every effort to ensure continuity between WebTycho and my backup file, please review your reposted grades for accuracy and be sure to let me know of any discrepancies.

If you submitted any assignments to me while WebTycho was down, you will need to resubmit them via your Assignments Folder in WebTycho so that I can properly record your grade in the system.

I will upload copies of offline discussions into appropriate areas by October 10. If your study group held any offline discussions while WebTycho was down, please have one person in your group consolidate and post those discussions into the Conference area for your study group.

To accommodate everyone for time lost during the outage, I have changed the due date of Assignment 3 from October 15 to October 20. I have updated this information on the syllabus; please make sure you update it on your calendars!

As always, if you have any questions, please post them to the Questions Conference. If you need to discuss something personal, please e-mail me at psmith@gmail.com and I will respond as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,
Professor Smith

Grading

Transfer any grades and instructor comments that you maintained in a separate document into the WebTycho Gradebook by cutting and pasting the information into the correct location.

At the end of the semester, if WebTycho is inaccessible but the Faculty Portal in MyUMUC is operational, follow the end-of-semester grade posting procedures for entering grades.

Assignments

If students submitted any assignments in an alternate way during the outage, ask them to resubmit those assignments to their Assignments Folder in WebTycho once it is again available. This will allow you to officially record a grade for the assignment and properly calculate final grades, which must be submitted through the Faculty Portal in MyUMUC.

Conferencing

Follow these guidelines to handle conferencing issues:

- If you maintained a separate conference using any tool external to WebTycho, cut and paste the communications from that external source into structured conferences in WebTycho. For example, it would be appropriate to create special conferences entitled "Offline Conference Thread Archive" for students' reference.
- If you communicated with students via e-mail for pertinent classroom discussion or information, transfer these notes into WebTycho.
- If your students participated in offline conference threads for team projects, you may ask them to post these communications into WebTycho.
- It is likely that class participation is part of the students' grades. You may have to manually evaluate the offline conference participation and e-mails to calculate the students' class participation grades. If so, you must communicate to students the method that you used while WebTycho was not available.

Class Rosters

When you gain access to official systems, check your saved printed class roster with those maintained in the Faculty Portal and WebTycho. Be sure that all students' names are still accounted for in each application.

Syllabus

Update any changes to the syllabus caused by the outage. Be sure to post a class announcement to ensure that the class sees the change.

Withdrawal and Refund Policy

Given any policy revisions to policy #170.71 - Grade of Incomplete, Grade Pending, and Withdrawal, this policy should be spelled out in the academic policy that is published within the WebTycho classroom. All student concerns related to this policy must continue to be directed to your director.

Resuming Face-to-Face Classes

Communications

Once your physical classroom is available, you should immediately notify students about its status. Use the student roster backup that you created at the beginning of the class in order to do so. Exhibit D is a sample correspondence you can use to alert your students that class will resume at the site.

**Exhibit D: Sample Correspondence for Alerting Students
that Class Will Resume at a Face-to-Face Site**

Dear students,

I'm happy to inform you that the Shady Grove center has reopened and we will continue with our face-to-face ABCD111 class there beginning October 10 at 6:30 pm, our usual class meeting time. I look forward to seeing you again! Please contact me at psmith@gmail.com if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Professor Smith

Grading

Notify your students of when grades will be available in the online Gradebook in WebTycho.

If WebTycho is inaccessible, you will need to follow the grading procedures discussed under online classroom continuity.

Syllabus

Update any changes to the syllabus caused by the outage. Be sure to post a class announcement ensuring that the class sees the change.

Withdrawal and Refund Policy

Given any policy revisions to policy #170.71 - Grade of Incomplete, Grade Pending, and Withdrawal, this policy should be spelled out in the academic policy that is published within the WebTycho classroom.

Appendix A: Optional Tools and Technologies

You will use WebTycho for regular classroom activities. In the event of a classroom interruption, however, you may want to use one or more of the following tools to assist with classroom continuity. **The mention of a particular technology here does not imply endorsement by UMUC.**

Alternative Audio/Conferencing Technologies

These technologies allow you to record an audio lecture that you can send to students via e-mail or through some other means. You will need a microphone or headset to record your voice.

Audacity: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net>

PureVoice: <http://www.cdmatech.com/products/purevoice.jsp>

Alternative E-mail Accounts

These alternative e-mail accounts are free and generally provided unlimited mailbox storage.

G-Mail: <http://www.gmail.com>

Hotmail: <http://www.hotmail.com>

Yahoo: <http://mail.yahoo.com>

Instant Messaging/Chat/VOIP Technologies

These technologies allow one-on-one as well as group chats. Many allow you to save transcripts, and some allow for file transfers and PC-to-PC voice calls. Note that other people generally must have an account with the same vendor in order for you to communicate with each other.

AOL Instant Messenger (AIM): <http://www.aim.com>

Google Talk: <http://www.google.com/talk>

Skype: <http://www.skype.com>

Yahoo Messenger: <http://messenger.yahoo.com>

Appendix B: Continuity of Library Services

The IT infrastructure supporting Information and Library Services database access to students, faculty, and staff is currently in the process of being upgraded to allow for full redundancy. Hardware has been purchased to provide redundancy of the two servers that work together to provide authentication and database access, EzProxy and Midas. This hardware will be installed and configured in summer or early fall 2007. The backup servers will reside at UMUC's remote data center once it is established. As a result of these upgrades, downtime for library databases due to internal UMUC system failures will be limited to a few minutes at maximum. This will greatly reduce the risk of periods of inaccessibility for more than 24 hours resulting from failure of internal UMUC systems. The other important server that provides ILS's DocumentExpress service, ILLiad, could be repaired and back online within 8-12 hours, which is within acceptable risk limits because it is within the 24-hour period required.

Outages of more than 24 hours of ILS's vendor, Tutor.com, who provides 24x7 chat and e-mail services, would be handled by reducing the number of hours that services are available, reverting to e-mail and/or phone access only, and covering those hours using ILS staff working from either their offices at SFSC/PGIII/Dorsey Station, or from home if those sites were closed. Closure of the physical library spaces at SFSC or Dorsey Station would be covered by relying on online access and placing signage at the sites directing students to ILS's online resources. ILS staff would work from home or from alternate locations if the physical sites were inaccessible.

During periods of WebTycho inaccessibility, electronic reserved readings are unavailable. Faculty should make accommodations to delay assignments that require reserved readings materials. In some, but not all, cases ILS may be able to provide the materials directly to the individual students upon request, either in PDF format via e-mail or as a link to a library database, contingent upon availability.

For major uncontrollable outages such as power and network failures that render library database access, chat, or e-mail unavailable for more than 24 hours, ILS librarians would point patrons who contact ILS to library resources in their local area where they would be able to obtain assistance, such as academic or public libraries.

As a result of the IT improvements being put into place, the major risks for continuity of library services that are within control are addressed and the risk of inaccessibility of the services is greatly reduced.

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